

The World To Come: Jewish Messianism from Antiquity to Zionism

NEJS 191b
(Preliminary Syllabus)

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Course Description

The messianic idea is an engine of history. In the Jewish context, it has been central to the thought of rationalist philosophers and mystical kabbalists. It has motivated social movements from ancient Jewish apocalypticism to modern Jewish nationalism. Its importance also reaches far beyond Judaism. Intellectual and social movements from Marxism to contemporary American politics have roots in the Jewish messianic idea. We will spend time in the course analyzing contemporary politics in this light.

This course will explore the messianic idea in Jewish history. We will focus on both the unfolding of the messianic idea in theory and also on the sects and movements that it spawned. The Jewish messianic idea has many varieties. We will trace its development from the Biblical Hebrew prophets, through the turbulent sectarianism at the time of Jesus and the quietistic response of the Talmudic period. We will then turn to messianic movements of Jews under medieval Islam and Christianity and its rational and mystical varieties before moving onto the pivotal moment of the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and the radically transformative movements of Sabbatianism and Hassidism. Finally, we will survey the ways in which the messianic idea continued to bear on modern Jewish history from 18th century Enlightenment to 19th century Emancipation movements and 20th century Zionism. Along the way, we constantly be thinking in broader conceptual terms about messianism and its manifestations.

Because of the wide historical scope of this course – we will cover over 2000 years of history – it will serve as a window onto Jewish history as a whole. It will also be a case study in the unfolding of a single idea in vastly different historical moments and social

contexts. It should therefore be relevant to anyone interested in comparative religion, intellectual history, religious anthropology, and the history of Judaism.

All required readings will be in English.

Grading

40%	Classroom participation and short response papers
20%	Midterm essay (800-1000 words)
40%	Take-home Final Exam (2000 words)

Class Conduct

Reading

All reading must be completed before the session to which it applies.

Technology policy

Cell phones and other electronic devices are never permitted in class.

The evidence increasingly suggests that most students produce better work and receive higher grades when taking notes by hand rather than using a laptop, and that sitting near students using laptops and other electronic devices has a negative effect on your grades *even if you are not using such devices yourself*. For these reasons, **we strongly encourage everyone to leave laptops packed away.**

Email is the best way that I have to communicate with you outside of class. Even if email is not your usual mode of communication, please make sure that you check it every day in case I need to get in touch with you. Similarly, please make check Latte frequently so that you are aware of announcements about the course.

Credit Hours

Success in this 4 credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.)

Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University [Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at [LTS - Library guides](#).

Detailed Course Overview

The following is a provisional outline of the units of the course. The instructor will be as responsive as possible to the interests of the participating students and, to that end, readings and topics might be changed.

Unit 1. Introduction

Unit 2. The Hebrew Bible

“Eschatology”, Encyclopaedia Judaica

Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) Chapter 10, “Messianism”.

Historical Archetypes

Genesis 1-4

Exodus 19

Deuteronomy 29-30

Kingship

Deuteronomy 17:8-20

1 Samuel 8

2 Samuel 7

Prophecy

Amos 8:11-9:15

Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-16

Ezekiel 37-39

Unit 3. Second Temple Period and Late Antiquity

Apocalypse

Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010) Chapters 1, 3.

Isaiah 52-53

Zechariah 13-14

Daniel 7-9; 12

Dead Sea Scrolls, selections

Jews Under Rome

Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.10.4-7; 20.5.1 and *Wars of the Jews* 4.9.3-12; 7.2.1. [\[Link\]](#)

Richard A. Horsley, “Popular Messianic Movements Around the Time of Jesus,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (NYU Press, 1992), 83–112.

Peter Schäfer, “Diversity and Interaction: Messiahs in Early Judaism,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (Brill, 1998), 15–35.

Unit 4. Jesus and Early Christianity

Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 23–49.

David Flusser and Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007) selections.

Matthew 1; 16:13-20; 17:1-13; 27-28

Acts 2:11-24; 8:26-40

Revelation 19:11-21:4

Unit 5. Rabbinic Judaism

Bar Kochba

Lee I. Levine. "Judaism from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Second Jewish Revolt: 70-135 C.E." [\[Link\]](#)

Rabbinical Literature

Babylonian Talmud 96-99

Midrash Eichah Rabbah 1:33

Unit 6. The Middle Ages

Maimonides

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings (selections)

Epistle to Yemen

Essay on Resurrection

Berger, David. "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus." *AJS Review* 10, no. 2 (October 1, 1985): 141–64.

Mysticism, Spanish Expulsion and Lurianic Kabbalah

Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs* Chapter 5.

Isaiah Tishby, "Acute Apocalyptic Messianism," in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (NYU Press, 1992), 259–88.

Matt D. Goldish, "Mystical Messianism: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment," in *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship* (NYU Press, 2011).

Joseph Dan, "Joseph Della Reina: From Experience to Legend," in *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 181–94.

Calculating the End

Abba Hillel Silver, *History of Messianic Speculation in Israel 1927* (Kessinger Publishing, 2003) selections.

Unit 7. Sabbatianism and its Aftermath

Gershom Scholem, “Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (NYU Press, 1992), 289–334.

Unit 8. Hasidism

Epistle of the Besht

Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

Nahman of Breslow, selections

Unit 9. Chabad

Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, “Basi le-gani” (1951)

Rachel Elijor, “The Lubavitch Messianic Resurgence: The Historical and Mystical Background 1939-1996,” ed. Peter Schäfer and Marc Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 383–408.

Unit 10. Emancipation and Religious Reform

The Pittsburgh Platform [\[Link\]](#)

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3–22.

Unit 11. Zionism 1 (Secular Messianism?)

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997) Introduction. (Read the whole thing if you can. If you are short on time, read at least pp 15-32, 45-72, 95-100).

Herzl, “The Jewish State”, extracts

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Unit 12. Zionism 2 (Religious Zionism)

Avraham Isaac Kook, “Eulogy for Theodor Herzl”

Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996) Chapter 3.

Dov Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism: History and Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009) selections.

Unit 13. Zionism 3 (Messianism in Israel Today)

Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, Reprint edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) selections.

Reuven Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism: The Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2012) selections.

Unit 14. Messianism and modern politics: Concluding thoughts

