

**Portland State University
Oregon School of Judaic Studies
Summer 2004**

Hst 410/510: Religion and Identity in the Greco-Roman World:
Jews, Christians, and Others
June 21-July 14 Tuesday/Thursday 19:00-21:20,
Prof. Robert Kugler, Lewis and Clark College

Course Description. What was it to be a Jew or Christian in the ancient Middle East, facing the enormous cultural and religious pluralism presented by the Greco-Roman world? In this course, we explore the historical contexts and texts important in understanding the question of religious identity in a plural society. We survey the answers to this question that survive in the writings of Jews and Christians from the ancient Mediterranean, especially those from Greco-Roman Egypt because it was such a hotbed of pluralism in the ancient world. The texts we read will include excerpts from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, Josephus, Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a number of other Jewish and Christian non-biblical works. Modern authors whose theories we will discuss include Martin Hengel, John J. Collins, Erich Gruen, Louis Feldman, Peter Schäfer, H. Idris Bell, David Frankfurter, Susan Stephens, and others. The value in the exercise we undertake lies not merely in its historical interest, but also in its capacity to reveal the dynamics of asserting religious identity in

any culturally and religiously pluralistic context, including our own today.

Instructional/Learning Needs. Students needing accommodation should immediately inform the instructor. Students can contact Disability Services 725-5664 for support where appropriate.

Methods. Each class session entails interactive lectures which are facilitated by student completion of pre-assigned readings (see below).

Course Reading. The readings are drawn from two course textbooks that provide historical background, selected primary sources, and short selections from contemporary historians and theorists.

Course Expectations and Approach. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. Doing so entails timely and consistent course attendance, appropriate requests for assistance from the instructor, reading and reflection on the assigned readings *before the class sessions for which they are assigned*, and active participation in the interactive class lectures. *Nota bene:* Because the course is so brief late assignments are not permitted.

Course Requirements.

- (1) Completion of daily reading assignments and active participation in class sessions (see below).
- (2) *For students taking the course for academic credit*

the following additional requirements apply.

§ Written responses to discussion-starter questions provided with four writing assignments.

§ Brief essay on a selected primary text and its strategy for defining religious identity in a plural context.

Course Texts (available in the PSU Bookstore).

Griggs, C. Wilfred. *Early Egyptian Christianity*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Mélèze Modrzejewski, Joseph. *The Jews of Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Reader for Hst 410/510: Religion and Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jews, Christians, and Others.

Schedule of Topics and Reading Assignments

June 21 and 23—Orientation to the Topic and Historical Background (Judaism)

Reading: Mélèze Modrzejewski (to be read during the period of June 21-30) and Griggs (to be read during the period of June 31-July 12).

Objectives: To lay the groundwork for appreciating the variety of opinions regarding Jewish and Christian self-definition in the Greco-Roman world and to establish adequate historical background for reading primary texts.

June 28, 30, and July 5—Jewish Responses to Pluralism in the Greco-Roman World

Reading: Selections from Josephus, Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament; *Joseph and Aseneth*; 3 Maccabees; *Testament of Abraham*; *Testament of Job*; Wisdom of Solomon; AND selections from Hengel, Gruen, Feldman, and Schäfer.

Objectives: To see the variety of Jewish responses to pluralism in the Greco-Roman world and to test the theories proposed by Hengel, Collins, Gruen, Feldman, and Schäfer regarding Jewish responses; AND to consider the usefulness of our historical study for contemporary experience.

July 7, 12, and 14—Historical Background and Christian Responses to Pluralism in the Greco-Roman World

Reading: Selections from the New Testament, Clement, Origen, Athanasius; *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; *Apocalypse of Elijah*; AND selections from Bell, Frankfurter, and Stephens.

Objectives: To see the variety of Christian responses to pluralism in the Greco-Roman world and to test the theories proposed by Bell, Frankfurter, and Stephens regarding the interactions between native Egyptian culture, Greek and Roman influences, and Christian religion; AND to consider the usefulness of our historical study for contemporary experience.