

**RELIGION 211-001**  
**Religions of the Near East**  
**Spring 2008, MW12-1:15**

**Dr. Randi Rashkover**  
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**Office Hours: MW11-12:00**

**Course Description:**

This course will explore the history, beliefs and practices of the religions that originated among the peoples of the Near East. We will deal with the three major world religions to come out of this region—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The course will also introduce to students to a ‘family resemblance’ approach to the comparative study of religion by identifying categories and conceptual features that overlap and relate between each of the three traditions.

**Course Objective:**

By the end of the course students should be able to identify the major categories and concepts at work in the study of religion as applied to the study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Students will also be familiar with how religious traditions develop institutionally and theologically through time and through their encounters with outside cultures and religions. Finally, the course aims to develop students’ communication skills, emphasizing oral communication through class participation and presentation of key arguments; written communication through informal and formal writing assignments and reading skills through the use and analysis of primary texts in each of the three traditions.

**Required Reading:**

1. Corrigan, et al. *Jews, Christians, Muslims*. NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998.
2. Biblical and Qur’anic selections.

**NOTE:** The text of the Bible is available online at [www.bibleontheweb.com/Bible.asp](http://www.bibleontheweb.com/Bible.asp)

The text of the Qur’an is available online at [www.al-sunnah.com/call\\_to\\_islam/quran/pickthall/](http://www.al-sunnah.com/call_to_islam/quran/pickthall/)

**Grade Evaluation:**

Midterm examination: 25%

Class participation: 15%

Two Essays: 15% each

Final examination: 30%

**Attendance policy:** Students who are absent in excess of **three** class times without appropriate excuse will have their grade dropped one entire grade at the end of the semester.

Students should not and do not have to inform me of their absences if they are within the 3 absence limit.

Please be responsible for getting any notes and/or information missed from another student when absent.

Feel free to discuss missed work with me after you have gotten the notes and done the required reading.

**Writing:** Students in the course will be expected to demonstrate strong writing skills in their essays and exams. I will help you work on your writing and will give detailed explanations for how to work on each assignment.

**Honor Code:** Please remember that GMU adheres to the honor system.

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student who needs extra time and/or help with assignments due to a disability should let me know in writing and/or through the proper office at the university.

### SYLLABUS

#### Week 1: d Course Introduction and Judaism: Creation to Covenant

a. Introduction

b. Judaism: Creation to Covenant

1. Historical and textual background

2. Genesis 1

Readings:

Genesis 1

Corrigan: 1-25

#### Week 2- Judaism: Creation to Covenant (cont.)

Readings:

a. Genesis 1, Genesis 17

b. Exodus 19

Corrigan: 77-86,

#### Week 3-4: Judaism: Law, Society and Ethics

a. Sinaitic Law

b. Tabernacle Law

c. Rabbinic Law

1. What is Oral Law

2. Rabbinic Law and Worship

Readings:

Exodus 19, 20

Leviticus 19 (holiness code)  
Mishnah Avot, ch.1 (hand-out)  
Talmud, Baba Mezia 59a-59b (hand-out)  
Corrigan: 279-296, 157-173

**Week 5: Judaism: Religion and Politics**

- a. Davidic Covenant
- b. Diaspora (Jeremiah, Babylonia and beyond)
- c. Contemporary Zionism

Readings:

2nd Samuel 7

Corrigan: 421-440

**Week 6: Christianity: The Christian Message: History and Development**

Gospel: The Christian Message: Scripture and Theology

- a. Early Christians
- b. Paul's Gospel

Readings:

Romans chapters 1-3

Corrigan: 26-51

**Week 7: Christianity: The Christian Message: The Gospels and the New Testament**

- a. Gospels: Mark, Matthew, Luke,
- b. John

Readings: Mark 1:9-29, Matthew 4, Luke 4, John 1:1-18

**Week 8: Christianity: Theology and Christology**

- a. Jesus and Apologetics: Logos (Justin Martyr)
- b. Jesus, Incarnate and Tri-une: Marcion, Nicaea, Chalcedon

Readings: Nicene Creed (hand-out)

Corrigan: 105-133

**Week 9: Ethics, Practice and the Church**

- a. Ethics and Praxis in the Gospels
- b. The Catholic Church, the Sacraments and the Reformation

Readings:

3

Matthew 5 (Sermon on the Mount)  
Luke 6:12-7 ( Sermon on the Plain)  
John: 6:25-7  
Martin Luther: “The Three Walls” (hand-out)  
Corrigan: 296-322, 235-255, 441-462

### **Week 10: Islam: Sacred Story, Scriptures and Historical Development**

a. Story of the Prophet and the Book  
1. Muhammed and the Night of Power (Sura 17:1)  
2. Ummah in Medina  
b. Spread of Islam and World Development  
1. Submission of Mecca  
2. The Umma in History  
a. Classical Islam  
b. Development of Shari’ah and theology  
c. Golden Age of Islam  
Readings: Sura 17:1  
Corrigan: 52-72, 195-209

### **Week 11: Islam: Theology and Beliefs**

Readings: Surah 1, Surahs 1:1-48, 2:28-39 (creation)  
Surahs 2:255-257. 112:1-4 (revelation)  
Surah 75 (resurrection)  
Corrigan: 134-151

### **Week 12-13: Islam: Worship, Law and Society**

a. Five Pillars: Sura 17:21-37  
b. Hadith and Shariah: Society and Ethics and Law:  
Readings:  
Hadith: Sahih al Bukhari, 5:227  
Shariah:  
Al-Shafi’i: chapter 11, 12, 13 (hand-outs)  
Corrigan: 256-273, 463-479

### **Week 14: Comparison and Review**