OBJECTIVE:
This course surveys the literature and culture of the Jews from the Bible onward. We will discuss selected texts from the Hebrew Bible with an eye for conflict and resolution, highlighting themes such as crime and punishment, barrenness and fertility, piety and transgression, the divine and the human. We will see the bible texts as palimpsests, of sorts, whose themes are rewritten later in numerous exegetical modes, examining the Talmud and Midrash and Apocrypha and then Medieval literature as illustrative of this notion of revisiting and revising. We will continue to trace the evolution of the text as a central concern of Jews throughout the centuries in legal, linguistic, religious, and cultural terms, investigating the Hasidic tales and their 19th and 20th century offshoots in Eastern Europe. Jewish American fiction will round out the course, along with a taste of Modern Hebrew literature, underscoring the urgency of Biblical themes and religious tradition, translated and reworked for modern eyes and ears.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:
There will be two research-assisted papers (6-8 pages each)—dates are noted below.

- Each student will deliver one short (five-minute) oral presentation that poses questions and offers close readings of passages from the day’s assignment. Steer clear of summaries for this presentation. Your best bet is to figure out what baffles you about the day’s reading and offer some questions and answers about that bafflement.
- There will be 2 short response papers, due dates are noted below. More details will follow.
- One day will be devoted to a “Library Tutorial,” and will include an excursion to the CCNY library and a librarian’s interactive lecture to help you with research strategies.
- Students should minimize absences. More than 4 will adversely affect the grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Course packets (3) provided by instructor.
Malamud, Bernard. The Assistant. FSG. (1957)

OPTIONAL TEXT:

PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN:
Paper 1: 30%
Paper 2: 40%
Oral Presentation: 10%
Response Papers 20%

(This Schedule May Change According to the Needs of the Class.)

Unit 1: The Hebrew Bible:
Theme: The Imperfect World
Genesis: Creation, Fratricide, Divine Regret
(packet 1-25)
W 8/28
M 9/2: No class, Labor Day
W 9/4: No class, Rosh Hashana
M 9/9
W 9/11
Theme: Making and Breaking Promises
Genesis: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob Joseph
(packet 26-86)
M 9/16
W 9/18
M 9/23
W 9/25
M 9/30 Response Paper 1 Due

Theme: Answer the Call
Exodus: Moses. Prophets: Samuel, Jonah
(packet 87-117 and Scheindlin chapter 1, p1-23)
W 10/2
M 10/7
W 10/9 Library Lecture: Meet on first floor of Cohen Library in the Tech Center, Room STC 3
M 10/14: No class, Columbus Day
T 10/15: Monday Schedule:

Theme: Strong Women, Foolish Men
Megillot (Scrolls): Ruth, Esther
(packet 118-133)
W 10/16: Paper 1 Due
M 10/21
W 10/23

Unit 2: Hidden Lore and Oral Law: 2nd Temple and Beyond
Theme: The Lustful and the Lost
Apocrypha: The Story of Susanna, The Book of Tobit
(packet 134-147 and Scheindlin chapter 2, p25-49)
M 10/28
(read Mazel if you plan to turn in the extra credit assignment on 11/6)

Theme: The Sacred and the Profane:
Selections from Mishna (Avot), Gemara (Halacha: Berakhot; Aggada: The Book of Legends), and Midrash (the Book of Yashar))
(packet 148-161 and Scheindlin chapter 3, p51-69)
W 10/30
M 11/4
W 11/6 Optional Extra Credit Assignment on Mazel Due

Unit 3: The Middle Ages and the Modern Period
Theme: Why are we here?
Berekhiah Hanakdan: Fables of a Jewish Aesop
Maimonides: Selections from the Mishneh Torah
M 11/11
W 11/13

Theme: Hasidim: Rebels with a Cause
(Halberstam Selections (handout) and Scheindlin chapter 8, p173-187)
M 11/18: Response Paper 2 Due
W 11/20

Unit 4: Modern Hebrew Literature
Yiddish, Hebrew, Beyond the Pale, Palestine
Theme: Cultivating language and style
Cynthia Ozick: “Bialik’s Hint”; Stories by Mendele Mocher Sforim, Bialik, Govrin
(packet)
M 11/25
W 11/27: No class, Friday schedule
M 12/2
W 12/4

Unit 5: Jewish American Fiction
America: Easy or Uneasy Fit. The Post-Holocaust Naissance
Theme: Assimilation, Accommodation, Alienation, Integration?
M 12/9: Malamud’s The Assistant
W 12/11: Paper 2 Due and The Assistant, cont’d

Projected Course Learning Outcomes:
We will
ANALYZE primary sources in translation: Biblical, Rabbinic, Modern
EVALUATE secondary sources that revisit or interpret primary texts
DEMONSTRATE basic knowledge of stages of evolution of Jewish Civilization and how historical factors have contributed to this evolution
FORMULATE new, creative approaches to tradition based on independent research
CONNECT classroom lectures with fieldwork that makes tangible elements of contemporary Jewish life

General Education Proficiencies
After completing this course you will have developed the following proficiencies:
Oral and written communication skills (CS) –You will have had multiple experiences in communicating ideas in writing and speaking. You will complete assignments totaling at least 3500 words of writing.
Critical analysis (CA) –You will have had multiple experiences in critically and constructively analyzing information in different areas of study.
Information literacy (IL) –You will have had multiple experiences in finding information in the library, on the Internet, and in other places and in evaluating the reliability of this information.