



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Abarbanel: Exile & Exegesis – Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2023

Course Number: JHIS 4931H M [CRN: 31454]

Sessions Meet: T/R (1:35pm-2:50pm) [Location SCW 301]

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Overview

This course will explore the life and thought of one of Jewish history's most celebrated figures. Fifteenth century diplomat, economist, historian, exegete, and refugee Don Isaac Abarbanel led an illustrious life defined by exile and exegesis, and left a legacy that shaped generations of Jews to follow. We'll examine the historical circumstances that set the parameters of his geographic, political, and intellectual context, and then turn to his voluminous output—touching on topics from mourning and monarchy to miracles and messianism—which revolutionized biblical commentary and lay the foundations for Jewish survival over the course of the age of the ghetto. We'll conclude with a study of his son Judah's contribution to Jewish thought and a sense of how Abarbanel influence is felt to this day.

Required Texts

For this course there are no materials that you will be required to purchase—all readings will be made available on canvas or are available online and will be linked or indicated on the canvas page.

Attendance and Participation

This class is a collaborative endeavor and depends for its success on your steady attendance and informed participation, so your final grade may well be swayed by the quality—in addition to the reality—of your participation in class. Poor attendance (i.e., more than three absences during the term and/or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade considerably.

Due Dates

Assignments must be turned in on the date and hour they are due unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate needing an extension, please let me know well before the due date. Readings listed above a particular date are to be read for that date.

Please be aware of the University's *Academic Integrity Statement* as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the beginning of the semester. The office is located in 215 Lexington Ave, Suite 505. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. To make an appointment, go to yu2.mywconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation – 10%

Midterm – 40%

Final – 50%

Week 1: Welcome

Readings: n/a

August 29th: Welcome and Overview

Readings: Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain (Volatile Origins: The Early History of Jewish Life in Spain)*

August 31st: Jewish Spain Part 1—Empires and Tribes

Week 2: Introduction

Readings: Jonathan Ray, *Jewish Life in Medieval Spain (At the Edge of the West: Jewish Life in al-Andalus)*

September 5th: Jewish Spain Part 2—Under Crescent

Readings: Jonathan Ray, *Jewish Life in Medieval Spain (1391: Riots, Conversions, and the New Status Quo)*

September 7th: Jewish Spain Part 3—Under Cross and Beyond

Week 3: Intellectual Context

Readings: Plato, Republic (*The Allegory of the Cave* [514a-520b])

September 12th: Plato's Ghost

Readings: R.C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas (Aristotle: the Philosopher)*

September 14th: Aristotle's Logic

Week 4: Meeting the Don

Readings: E. Lawee, *Life and Contexts*

September 19th [REMOTE]: Abarbanel Part 1—Iberian Beginnings

Readings: E. Lawee, *Life and Contexts*

September 21st [REMOTE]: Abarbanel Part 2—Exile and Exegesis

Week 5: Creed and Correspondence 1

Readings: n/a

September 26th: N/A (Friday Classes)

Readings: *Portuguese Letter*

September 28th: Humanistic Consolation

Week 6: Sukkot

Week 7: Creed and Correspondence 2

Readings: *Hebrew Letters*

October 10th:

Readings: *Hebrew Letters*

October 12th:

Week 8: Biblical Beginnings

Readings: *Ateret Zekeinim*

October 17th: Elders and Elitism

Readings: *Introduction to Early Prophets*

October 19th: Inspiration and Inscription

Week 9: Political Theory 1

Readings: *Commentary to the Early Prophets*

October 24th: Biblical Kingship 1

Readings: *Commentary to the Early Prophets*

October 26th: Biblical Kingship 1

Week 10: Political Theory 2

Readings: *Commentary to the Early Prophets*

October 31st: Biblical Republicanism 1

Readings: *Commentary to the Early Prophets*

November 2nd: Biblical Republicanism 2

Week 11: From Exile to Exodus

Readings: *****MIDTERM*****

November 7th: *****MIDTERM*****

Readings: *Zevach Pesach* [Haggadah Commentary]

November 9th: Exodus and Exile

Week 12: From Exodus to Ethics

Readings: *Nachalat Avot* [Pirkei Avot Commentary]

November 14th: Ethics and Exile

Readings: *Rosh Amanah* [Treatise on Dogma]

November 16th: Doctrine and Exile

Week 13: N/A

Readings: N/A

November 21st: Friday Classes

Readings: N/A

November 23rd: Thanksgiving

Week 14: From Ethics to Apocalypse

Readings: *Ma'anei Yeshua*

November 28th: Messianism 1

Readings: *Ma'anei Yeshua*

November 30th: Messianism 2

Week 15: Influence and Followers

Readings: *Dialoghi d'amore* [Scroll of Love]

December 5th: Judah Abarbanel 1

Readings: *Dialoghi d'amore* [Scroll of Love]

December 7th: Judah Abarbanel 2

Week 16: Exegetical Legacy

Readings: T.B.D.

December 12th: Guest Lecture

Readings: Presentations

December 14th: Presentations

Week 17: Overview

Readings: Final Preparation

December 19th: Overview

Readings: N/A

December 21st: Study Day

January 4th @ 11:59pm: *Final Assessment Due*