



REL 3692

Jerusalem: Religious, Historical, Political, and Cultural Significance

Section: U01

In Person

Fall Term 2026

Course Meeting Information

We shall be meeting twice a week - one meeting will be a lecture, the other a seminar

Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites, if any, are listed below.

Course Description

REL 3692

Jerusalem: Religious, Historical, Political, and Cultural Significance

Department of Religious Studies

Instructor: Tudor Parfitt

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Jerusalem is one of the most symbolically powerful and contested cities in the world. For Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it has served as a sacred center, a place of memory, a destination of pilgrimage, and a focus of religious longing. At the same time, Jerusalem has been a political capital, an imperial prize, a colonial problem, a nationalist symbol, and a site of conflict.

This course examines the religious, historical, political, and cultural significance of Jerusalem from the period of ancient Israel to the present day. It will consider the city as a physical place, a sacred landscape, a political symbol, and an object of competing religious and national claims. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which Jerusalem has been imagined, remembered, possessed, lost, recovered, and reinterpreted by different communities over time.

The course will analyze the development of Jerusalem's significance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, including its role in biblical tradition, post-biblical Judaism, early Christianity, Islamic sacred geography, the Crusades, the Ottoman period, the British Mandate, Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, and the modern Middle East. It will also consider broader theoretical questions concerning sacred space, pilgrimage, memory, myth, political theology, archaeology, and the relationship between religious tradition and historical evidence.

Is Jerusalem the holiest place on earth? We shall see.

Textbook and Course Materials

Jerusalem: (Vintage) (2012)

Subtitle: The Biography

Required/Recommended: Required

Authors: Simon Sebag Montefiore

Publisher: Viking

Publication Date: 2012

Copyright Date: 2012

ISBN 10: 0307280500

ISBN 13: 978-0307280503

Notes: This is the one essential book

Description: Overview of Jerusalem brilliantly written - grand narrative sweep

Chapters/Pages: all

Jerusalem

Required/Recommended: Recommended

Authors: Colin Thubron

Publisher: Penguin

Publication Date: 1996

Copyright Date: 1996

ISBN 10: 0140245472 I

ISBN 13: 978-0140245479

Notes: This book offers a vivid literary and historical introduction to Jerusalem, with particular attention to the atmosphere, memory, religious imagination, and contested meanings of the city. It will be used alongside Montefiore's broader historical narrative.

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Chapters/Pages: all

Panther Book Pack

Get all required course materials for \$22 per undergrad credit hour through Panther Book Pack. You'll be charged automatically unless you opt out within 3 days after the add/drop deadline.

For more details, to compare costs, and to learn how to access your course materials, visit the [Panther Book Pack information page on FIU OneStop](#).

Readings, Materials, and Open Educational Resources (OER)

Required and recommended readings for the course will be drawn from books, articles, primary sources, and other materials dealing with the religious, historical, political, and cultural significance of Jerusalem. Additional readings, documents, and online resources may be made available through Canvas.

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings before class and to come prepared to discuss them.

The following works will be used or consulted during the course:

Colin Thubron, *Jerusalem*. Penguin Books, new edition, 1996.

Joshua Prawer and Haggai Ben-Shammai, eds., *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period, 638–1099*. Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi; New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*. Vintage, 2012.

Tudor Parfitt, *The Jews in Palestine*. Royal Historical Society Studies in History 52. Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1987.

Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, Volume II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100–1187*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

John Gray, *A History of Jerusalem*. London, 1969.

Oded Peri, *Christianity Under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Walter Zander, *Israel and the Holy Places of Christendom*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.

Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Eric H. Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *O Jerusalem!*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

The Holy Cities: Jerusalem. Produced by Danae Film Production; distributed by HDH Communications, 2006.

Bernard Wasserstein, *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.

Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*. Columbia University Press, 1997.

Where appropriate, open educational resources, public-domain texts, and online materials will be used to supplement the assigned readings.

Course Goals

Course Goals

This course aims to introduce students to Jerusalem as a city of exceptional religious, historical, political, and cultural significance. It will examine the ways in which Jerusalem has been understood, claimed, contested, remembered, and sacralized by Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others from antiquity to the present.

The course seeks to place Jerusalem within several overlapping frameworks: as a historical city, as a sacred landscape, as a focus of pilgrimage and devotion, as a symbol of collective memory, and as a continuing political problem. Students will be encouraged to think critically about the relationship between religious tradition, historical evidence, sacred space, archaeology, nationalism, and modern international affairs.

A further goal of the course is to help students understand how cities can become powerful symbols within religious and political imagination. Jerusalem will therefore be studied not only as a place on the map, but also as an idea, a memory, a mythic center, and a site of competing claims to holiness, legitimacy, and ownership.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

LEARNING OUTCOMES Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to: Identify the major historical periods in the development of Jerusalem from antiquity to the present. Explain the religious significance of Jerusalem in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Compare and contrast competing religious, historical, and political claims to the city. Analyze the relationship between sacred space, collective memory, ritual, and political power. Assess the role of Jerusalem in regional and international affairs. Understand how archaeology, scripture, tradition, nationalism, and modern politics shape interpretations of Jerusalem. Evaluate the continuing cultural and symbolic importance of Jerusalem in both traditional religious communities and new religious movements.

Develop a critical understanding of theories of holiness, sacred geography, pilgrimage, and place.

Expectations of the Course

Students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, complete assigned readings before class, and participate thoughtfully in discussion. Because this course deals with religious, historical, political, and cultural claims that are often deeply felt and sometimes controversial, students are expected to engage with the material and with one another respectfully and critically.

All written assignments must be submitted by the stated deadlines. Late work may be penalized unless an extension has been granted in advance or there are documented exceptional circumstances. Students are responsible for keeping track of assignment deadlines, examination dates, and course requirements.

Class participation should demonstrate preparation, intellectual seriousness, and respect for differing views. Students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge arguments, and offer interpretations, but all discussion must remain civil and academically grounded.

The mid-term examination, student presentation, weekly assignments, and final paper all contribute to the final grade. Failure to complete any major component of the course may significantly affect the final grade.

Students are expected to observe FIU's policies on academic integrity. Plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, or submission of work that is not one's own may result in serious academic penalties. All sources used in written work must be properly cited.

Use of electronic devices in class should be limited to course-related purposes. Students should avoid activities that distract themselves or others.

Students requiring academic accommodations should contact the appropriate FIU office and inform the instructor in a timely manner so that reasonable accommodations can be made in accordance with university policy.

Assignments & Assessments

Student performance in this course will be assessed through weekly assignments, a mid-term examination, a student presentation, and a final research paper.

Weekly assignments: 15%

Students will complete regular short assignments based on the course readings and class discussions. These assignments are designed to encourage steady engagement with the material and preparation for class.

Mid-term examination: 20%

The mid-term examination will assess students' understanding of the major historical, religious, political, and cultural themes covered in the first part of the course.

Student presentation: 15%

Each student will give a presentation on a topic related to the course.

Presentations should demonstrate familiarity with the relevant readings and an ability to explain the significance of the chosen topic to the wider themes of the course.

Final paper: 50%

Students will write a final paper of approximately 3,000 words. The paper should present a clear argument, engage with relevant course themes and readings, and show evidence of independent thought and careful research.

Grading

Final grades will be calculated according to the following distribution:

Weekly assignments: 15%

Mid-term examination: 20%

Student presentation: 15%

Final paper, approximately 3,000 words: 50%

Students are expected to complete all required components of the course.

Failure to submit a major assignment or to complete the mid-term examination, presentation, or final paper may significantly affect the final grade.

Schedule of Topics

The schedule below provides an outline of the main topics to be covered during the course. The precise timing of topics may be adjusted as needed.

1. Introduction: Jerusalem as sacred city, historical city, and political symbol
2. The early history of Jerusalem
3. Jerusalem and the development of ancient Israelite religion
4. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and its religious consequences
5. Jerusalem in post-biblical Judaism
6. Sacred space, memory, pilgrimage, and religious imagination
7. Christianity and Jerusalem
8. The Muslim conquest of Jerusalem and its significance for Islam
9. The Crusades and the idea of the Holy City
10. Jerusalem under Islamic and Ottoman rule
11. Jerusalem in the nineteenth century
12. The British Mandate and the internationalization of the Jerusalem question
13. Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, and competing claims to Jerusalem
14. Jerusalem since the Israel War of Independence
15. The Six-Day War of 1967 and its consequences
16. Archaeology, scripture, memory, and modern political claims
17. Jerusalem in contemporary international affairs
18. Conclusion: Jerusalem — Holy City?

Course Communication

Students should use FIU email and Canvas for course communication. Important course announcements, assignment information, readings, and schedule updates will be posted on Canvas. Students are responsible for checking Canvas and their FIU email regularly.

Students may contact the instructor by email with questions about the course, assignments, readings, or other academic matters. Emails should be written in a clear and courteous manner and should include the course number, REL 3692, in the subject line when appropriate.

The instructor will make reasonable efforts to respond to student emails in a timely manner. Questions that require longer discussion may be addressed during office hours or by appointment.

Any changes to assignments, deadlines, readings, or class arrangements will be communicated through Canvas and/or FIU email.

Policies & Resources

Before starting this course, please review the Policies & Resources Page in Canvas, which includes comprehensive information on various University and Course Level Policies such as:

- University Policies
- Accessibility and Accommodations
- Online Etiquette
- Technical Requirements and Skills
- Computer & Digital Literacy Skills
- Course Technology Accessibility Statements and Privacy Policies
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright Statement
- Nondiscrimination Statement
- Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Fair Use Policy

Nondiscrimination Statement

The **Office of Civil Rights** (OCR) is responsible for ensuring that FIU maintains a workplace and learning environment free from discrimination, where current and prospective faculty, staff, and students are treated equitably. If any student, employee, or applicant has a sincere and reasonable belief that they have been discriminated against or harassed based on age, color, disability, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, retaliation, sex, or any other protected category, they can report their concerns to the OCR team through report.fiu.edu.

Course Awards

There are no formal course awards associated with this class.