

Hebrew College
Bible 600 – Bible: Text and Context
Fall Semester 2010 (online)
Instructor: Peretz Rodman

The aims of this course are fourfold:

1. **To provide students with familiarity with the contents of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh).** Successful students will be able to identify and describe the sweep of human and Israelite history as presented therein, prominent characters, the types of literature and their characteristics, and the major issues that the Tanakh engages directly.
2. **To provide students with a basic familiarity with major intellectual and religious approaches that characterize the disparate sources of biblical literature.** Successful students will be able to describe the differences in worldview between the prominent sources of the Torah, the outlook of the Deuteronomistic historians, the nature of the prophetic critique of popular religion in their times, the assumptions of the Wisdom authors, and other components of the Hebrew Bible's variegated and multivocal approach to religious and spiritual issues. This framework will help students see biblical texts more clearly in relation to one another and in relation to the traditions of Judaism that developed from them or define themselves in reference to them.
3. **To enable students to become informed and critical consumers of biblical scholarship.** Successful students will be able to place articles and books on biblical topics into the context of major debates and contemporary approaches in the study of Tanakh—debates and approaches with which they will have some familiarity.
3. **To familiarize students with some major ways in which Jewish literary/spiritual/religious traditions have engaged with the Tanakh and continue to do so.** Successful students will be able to access, use, and place into historical context Jewish writings about the Tanakh, including ancient interpretation, rabbinic midrash, medieval commentary, and some of the major modern Jewish interpreters of the Bible.

Books for use and reference:

[Note: Many are available at libraries and from vendors of used books.]

Required:

- **Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*.** Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Available in hardcover and paperback editions. This book contains the complete text of the Jewish Publication Society of America translation of the *Tanakh* produced between the early 1960's and the mid-1980's, along with a contemporary critical commentary and very useful essays about the Tanakh's relationship with the world from which it emerged and about Jewish understandings of the Tanakh over the centuries.

- **James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*.** New York: Free Press, 2007. This work surveys the results of centuries of modern scholarly examination of the Hebrew Bible, both broadly and text-by-text. In addition, it inquires into how early postbiblical Judaism and rabbinic Judaism understood these texts. [Available in a paperback edition.]
- **Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices*.** Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003. [Available as e-book.]
- **A course readings collection available from University Readers.**

Recommended:

- **Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. [1st edition: *How to Read the Bible*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005]. A readable and insightful survey of major books and genres, now in an affordable paperback edition with a slightly revised title.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are expected to

- complete all **reading assignments**
- take an active part in each unit's online **discussion board**
- write **two short papers** of 5 to 10 double-spaced pages, choosing any two of five topics listed below or another topic agreed upon with the instructor, and
- take a short oral exam (15-20 minutes) to be administered by telephone or Skype (at no cost to the student) at a time to be scheduled with the instructor, between Tuesday, January 12 and Wednesday, January 20, 2011. Questions will focus on broad themes, not specific factual information.

Discussion board contributions should generally be completed during the allotted time for a unit, but occasional later contributions will be credited as well. (Sometimes an idea on an earlier topic is stimulated by later study and reflection.)

The first of **the two papers** must be submitted by Thursday, December 9, 2010, and the second by Wednesday, January 20, 2011.

The course **grade** will be based on discussion board participation (45%), the two short papers (40%) and the oral exam (15%).

Syllabus

Unit 1: Creation and Early Humanity

Special Topic: Documentary Hypothesis

Monday, September 20 – Wednesday, October 6 (includes *Sukkot* & *Shemini Atzeret*)

Reading:

- Genesis 1-11 [*For this and other source texts, please read the introduction to the book(s) in the Jewish Study Bible. The Jewish Study Bible's commentary can be consulted for explanation and enrichment. You will not be responsible for remembering details.*]
- E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible), 47-56. [course reader]
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 1-11 (“Torah: Introduction” and “Genesis: Introduction”).
- Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices*, 9-48 (“The Uniqueness of the Priestly Torah” and “Knowing Good and Evil: God and Humanity in J's Story of Beginnings”).

Unit 2: Patriarchs (and Matriarchs?) I: Abraham

Special Topic: Introduction to Modern Biblical Scholarship

Thursday, October 7 – Wednesday, October 13

Reading:

- Genesis 12-24.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 1-46 (“The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship”).
- [Recommended: *Jewish Study Bible*, 2084-2096 (“The Modern Study of the Bible”).]
- [Recommended: Joel Rosenberg, “Biblical Tradition: Literature and Spirit in Ancient Israel” in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol 1 (*From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*), ed. Arthur Green, 82-112.]

Unit 3: Patriarchs (and Matriarchs?) II: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Special Topic: Story as Political Polemic

Thursday, October 14 – Wednesday, October 20

Reading:

- Genesis 25-50.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 133-197.
- Steven Geller, “The Sack of Shechem,” *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 1-15.
- Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (transl. Jonathan Chipman), 189-211 (“Polemics in Genesis 34”).

Unit 4: Traditions of Exodus

Special Topic: Inner Biblical Interpretation

Thursday, October 21 – Wednesday, October 27

Reading:

- Exodus 1-17.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 198-232.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 1829-1835 (“Inner-Biblical Interpretation”).

Unit 5: Covenant and Law

Special Topic: Scribes, Law, and Traditions Both Oral and Written

Thursday, October 28 – Wednesday, November 3

Reading:

- Exodus 17-23, Deuteronomy 4:44-28:69.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 233-279.
- Material from Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite laws [provided by instructor]

Unit 6: Ritual, Priesthood, and Holiness

Special Topic: Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation

Thursday, November 4 – Wednesday, November 10

Reading:

- Leviticus 1-26.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 203-206 (“Leviticus: Introduction”), 2041-2047 (“Concepts of Purity in the Bible”).
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 284-287, 296-306.
- Knohl, *The Divine Symphony*, 51-85 (“Good, Evil, and Holiness in Isaiah and the Holiness School” and “Israel’s Debate over God’s Sanctuary”).
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 1835-1844 (“Early Nonrabbinic Interpretation”).

Unit 7: Deuteronomy: A “Second Torah”?

Special Topic: Rabbinic Midrash

Thursday, November 11 – Wednesday, November 17

Reading:

- Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43, 27-28 (yes, again), 32-34.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 356-363.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 306-316, 340-363.
- Material from *Devarim Rabbah* on the death of Moses [to be provided]
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 1863-1875 (“Midrash and Midrashic Interpretation”).
- [Recommended: *Jewish Study Bible*, 1844-1863 (“Classical Rabbinic Interpretation”).]

Unit 8: Joshua and Judges

Special Topic: Bible and History

Thursday, November 18 – Wednesday, November 24

Reading:

- Joshua 1-9, 22-24; Judges 1-21.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 364-401, 404-435.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 451-455 (from “*Nevi'im*: Introduction”), 2048-2062 (“Historical and Geographical Background of the Bible”).

Unit 9: Samuel and Kings

Special Topic: Bible Translations

Thursday, November 25 – Wednesday, December 8 [includes Thanksgiving]

Reading:

- 1 Samuel 1 – 2 Samuel 12
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 436-457, 474-491.
- Knohl, *The Divine Symphony*, 87-99 (“Israel’s Debate over King and Messiah”).
- Everett Fox, *Give Us a King!*, 37-56 (translation of 1 Samuel 8-12). [course reader]
- Robert Alter, *The David Story*, 41-69 (translation of 1 Samuel 8-12). [course reader]
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 2005-2020 (“Jewish Translations of the Bible”).

Unit 10: Classical (“Literary”) Prophecy

Special Topic: Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation

Monday, December 7 – Sunday, December 13

Reading:

- Jeremiah 1-2; 7; 15; 22; 25-26; 29; 31-32; 2 Kings 24-25.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 569-597.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 455-461 (from “Nevi’im: Introduction”), 1876-1900 (“Medieval Jewish Interpretation”).

Choose either Unit 11A or Unit 11B:

Unit 11A: Psalms

Special Topic: The Bible in Synagogue and Liturgy

Monday, December 14 – Tuesday, January 5, 2010

Reading:

- Psalms 6, 23, 29-30, 34, 90-93, 95-99, 114-118, 135-137, 145-150.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 458-473 (“The Psalms of David”).
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 1275-1279 (“*Kethuvim*: Introduction”), 1929-1937 (“The Bible in the Synagogue”).

Unit 11B: Wisdom

Special Topic: Canonization

Monday, December 14 – Tuesday, January 5, 2010

Reading:

- Job; Ecclesiastes 1-3, 7-8, 10, 12.
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 635-643.
- [Recommended: Marc Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, 231-234, 239-241.]
- Knohl, *The Divine Symphony*, 101-122 (“New Conceptions of Evil and Suffering during the Period of Exile and Return”).
- *Jewish Study Bible*, 2038-2039 (from: “The Religion of the Bible”) and 2072-2077 (“The Canonization of the Bible”).

Unit 12: *Megillot: Lamentations, Song of Songs, Ruth*
Special Topic: Feminist Biblical Criticism

Wednesday, January 6 – Tuesday, January 12

Reading:

- Lamentations, Song of Songs, Ruth
- Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 401-403, 514-517.
- Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 166-199 (“A Human Comedy”).
[course reader]

Unit 13: *Biblical Religion in Review*

Wednesday, January 13 – Friday, January 15 [yes, a 3-day unit]

Reading:

- *Jewish Study Bible*, 2021-2040 (“The Religion of the Bible”).
- Knohl, *The Divine Symphony*, 145-146 (“Postscript”).]