

**MOSES IN THE MIDRASH  
HEBREW COLLEGE**

**PROFESSOR SOL SCHIMMEL  
FALL 2010**

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**Moses is the central character in the Pentateuch, the leader chosen by God to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, lead them through the wilderness, and bring them to the borders of the land of Israel. Moses himself, however, is not allowed to enter the Holy Land. In this course we will study rabbinic-midrashic (and some pre-midrashic) interpretations of and elaborations upon the biblical narratives about the birth of Moses, his defense of the oppressed, his selection by God to lead Israel, his ascent to Mt. Sinai to receive the tablets of the covenant, the various rebellions against him, his placation of God's anger at Israel, his humility, his frustrated desire to enter the land of Israel, and his death. We will examine midrashic methods and goals, enjoy the creativity and ingenuity of the rabbinic imagination, and in some instances place rabbinic teachings about Moses in the historical/cultural context of the rabbinic period.**

**Course requirements are regular attendance, advance preparation of assigned texts and a paper or creative project.**

**Required Texts:**

**Hebrew-English *Tanakh***

**Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*, Volumes II and III. Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968 (1911). These are available in print and online. The designated pages from these volumes should be brought to class.**

**There will also be several handouts.**

**Legends and midrashic exegesis on the following biblical narratives will be read and discussed. Pages in parentheses are from the Ginzberg volumes. Exodus 2 and 3 are dealt with in Volume 2; From Exodus 24 the page numbers in parentheses are from Ginzberg Volume 3.**

**Exodus 2: 1-10 (The birth and infancy of Moses). (262-276)**

**Exodus 2: 11-15 (Moses defends the oppressed). (277-282)**

**Exodus 2: 16-22 (Moses in Midian). (292-293; 300-301)**

**Exodus 3: 1-9 (God appears to Moses in the Burning Bush). (304-305)**

**Exodus 3: 10-15 and 4: 1-17 (Moses' commission to leadership and his resistance to it). (316; 317-318;320-321; 325-326).**

**Exodus 24: 12-18 (Moses on Mount Sinai). (92-93; 106-08; 110; 112-114; 114-116)**

**Exodus 32: 7-14; Numbers 14: 1-20 (Moses prays on behalf of Israel and placates God's anger). (131-134; 278-281)**

**Numbers 12: 1-13 (Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses - Moses' humility and uniqueness). (255-260).**

**Numbers 16 (The Rebellion of Korah) (288 – 297)**

**Numbers 20:1-13 and 27:12-14. (Water from the Rock) (308-314; See Milgrom Excursus in Bamidbar)**

**Numbers 27: 12-23 (Moses transfers leadership to Joshua). (396-397; 398-400; 402-402).**

**Deuteronomy 3: 23-29 (Moses yearns to enter the Holy Land and not to die). (419-452).**

**Deuteronomy 32: 48-52 and 34: 1-12 (The death of Moses). (463-475; 479-481)**

The following books and articles are on reserve in the library.

### **Readings**

**1. Barry Holtz. Midrash. In *Back to the Sources: Reading the Jewish Classic Texts*. (Edited by Barry W. Holtz), pgs. 177-211, Summit Books, 1984.**

**2. Selections from James L. Kugel. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era*. Harvard University Press, 1998.**

**3. Judah Goldin. The Death of Moses: An Exercise in Midrashic Transposition. In Judah Goldin. *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature*. Edited by Barry L. Eichler and Jeffrey H. Tigay. Jewish Publication Society, 1988, pgs. 175-186.**