FALL SEMESTER

BaMidbar (Bible 401)

Tuesday 11:30 am – 1:00 pm.

Description

This course examines the Book of Numbers (BeMidbar), drawing on historical-critical approaches, as well as classical Jewish parshanut. We will address themes such as: the role of census, tribal encampment, trials in the Wilderness, challenges to leadership and prophecy. Students will engage in a wide-range of reading strategies – from Tannaitic Midrash (Sifre) to Jacob Milgrom.

Requirements:

- “Genres and Themes in Biblical Literature” (Bible 502a/502b) or the academic equivalent; Hebrew VII or above and/or the approval of the professor.

Goals of the Course:

- Reinforce text reading skills of the Humash in the original Hebrew, by reviewing some salient features of Biblical Hebrew phonology, morphology, and syntax, and through the usage of the concordance, B.D.B., and grammar resources.

- Review critical approaches to biblical scholarship: source Criticism (the Documentary Hypothesis), textual criticism, form criticism, folklore approaches, literary readings, and gender studies.

- Hone our skills in the distinction between peshat (plain meaning, contextual reading) and derash (applied or extended meaning of the text), and the tools each level of exegesis requires.

- Learn to read the biblical text carefully, with an eye to discovering the “exegetical gap” or “hook” upon which the classic interpreter may base his or her reading. We will draw on a wide range of Medieval exegetes including Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, Meshekh Chokhmah, and others.
Familiarize ourselves with different midrashic compositions and their respective literary forms: Exegetical Midrash in the form of Midrash Halakhah (or, rather, tannaitic midrash, e.g. Sifre), the “Re-written Bible” of the Pseudepigrapha (e.g. Jubilees), and Homiletical Midrash (e.g. Tanhuma Yelamdenu).

Sensitize ourselves to the literary patterns, feminist perspectives, as well as major themes in the Book of Numbers: census, collective sin and punishment, concepts of holiness in person/place, the encampment and settlement of the Land, anticipation of exile, miracles in the desert, crises in leadership, and prophecy.

Required Texts:

- Any Hebrew Bible. Recommended: The bilingual JPS Tanakh or the bilingual Koren edition (preferred!).

- Miqra’ot Gedolot on BaMidbar (including Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra); recommend Torat Haim (published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook).

- Jacob Milgrom, The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1990) [From hereon Milgrom]

- Recommended: Yale Anchor Bible Commentary-- Numbers 1-20; Baruch A. Levine (New York 1993).

- All other readings will be placed on Reserve in the library and/or uploaded to “Schoology”.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

1. Participation (10%). Attendance and active involvement in discussion is critical to progress in this course. Preparation for class each week entails thorough Havruta study in of a section in BeMidbar in the original Hebrew (up to 20 verses), plus a daf mekorot (source sheet with guideline questions for the Beit Midrash), and at least one secondary source, introducing a critical article/reading pertinent to the passage at hand.

2. Bi- or tri-weekly Reflection Papers (60%). These five written assignments entail reflections on the primary readings, parshanut and articles that we will be reading over the course of the semester. They may serve as the basis for future Divrei Torah that you will present orally to the class and/or your future congregations. The work (2-3 pages double-spaced, 500-1000 words) will be sent to me (by email), and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student). Once during the semester, a student will present a Devar Torah based on her reflection paper. The dates for these biweekly reflection papers are as follows: Feb. 28th, March 11th, March 25th, April 29th, and May 6th.

3. Final Project: Teaching a Passage from BeMidbar (30%). Each student will submit one lesson plan, including sources (Primary sources from the Mikra, and commentary from the Medieval exegetes, midrash, and/or modern literary piece) and present it to the class as a model shiur.
a) A week before your presentation, you are to submit a detailed (2-3 pages) outline of your shiur, with clear questions, sources for study, and secondary sources (modern commentary) that you will be drawing upon.

b) The class will be presented in accordance with the syllabus (depending on the topic chosen).

c) In the last weeks of classes, students will write up a reflection/post-evaluation of their shiur. This will be due during the final week of the semester, Fri. May 23rd.

1. Tues. Feb. 4th First Week of Classes (Class 1) In the Wake of the Spies: *HaMa’apilim* and The Case of the Wood Gatherer (*HaMokoshesh ‘Ezim*)


2. Tues. Feb. 11th Class 2: Korah, Dathan, and Abriam: Two Rebellions or One?

   Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 39, “Korah’s Rebellion: A Study in Redaction.”

3. Tues. Feb. 18th Class 3: The Consequences of Korah’s Rebellion Fourth

   Primary Sources: Num. 16:19-17:27

   **First Reflection Paper due Feb. 18th!**

4. Tues. Feb. 18th Class 4: The Paradox of the Red Heifer

   Primary: Num. 19:1-22, & source sheet

5. Tues. March 4th (Class 5) From Kadesh to the Steppes of Moab: The Sin of Moshe and Aharon (*Déjà vu* or doublet scenes?)

   ORAL PRESENTATION: On Miriam’s Well (Jess?)

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Primary Sources: Num. 20:1-13; Exod. 17:1-7 and source sheet.

6. Tues. March 11th (Class 6) [Taanit Esther] The Copper Serpents and The Song of the Well

   ORAL PRESENTATION: On the Copper Serpents (Ora?)
Primary Reading: Num. 21:4-9 and 16-18
Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 52, “The Copper Snake” and Excursus 53, “The Song of the Well.”

   Second Reflection Paper due today, March 11th!

7. Tues. March 18th (Class 7) Balak/Bilam

   ORAL PRESENTATION: On the Prophecy of Balaam (Suzie?)

Primary Sources: Num. 22 & Source sheet.

8. Tues. March 25th (Class 8) Bilam’s Prophecy (content)
Primary Sources: Num. chs. 23-34 & Source Sheet.

   Third Reflection Paper due today, March 25th!

   No Class on Tues. April 1st, Rosh Hodesh Nisan, School-wide day of Learning

Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 61, “The Apostasy of Baal-Peor”.

   No Classes on Tues. April 15th and 22nd, Passover Break

10. Tues. April 29th (Class 10) The Apportionment of the Promised Land and Cities of Refuge
Primary Reading: Num. 26:52-56 and 35:6-7.

12. Tues. May 13th (Class 12) The Initiative to Settle East of the Jordan
   Primary Sources: Num. 32:1-42
   Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 69, “The Literary Structure of Chapter 32.”

Final Reflection Paper on Shiur due Friday, May 23rd

NO CLASS DURING FINALS WEEK
Bibliography


Useful URLs

1) **JPS: Tanach** - Hebrew and English
   

2) Comparing translations. You may access the NRSV online at: [http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm). To compare translations see: [http://www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org). See also “The Unbound Bible”, which has an effective search engine and allows you to compare versions: [http://unbound.biola.edu/](http://unbound.biola.edu/)

   See also Bible Gateway with online search engine, [http://www.biblegateway.com/](http://www.biblegateway.com/)

3) [http://earlyjewishwritings.com/](http://earlyjewishwritings.com/)
   - Includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and Philo

4) Machon Mamre, Tanach in **Hebrew** (including one with *cantillation marks*), **English** (JPS 1917), and **parallel Hebrew and English**, plus **Targum Onqelos**

5) Glossary of Basic Terms in Judaism [http://www.jewfaq.org/glossary.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/glossary.htm)

   This website contains the complete contents of the 12-volume Jewish Encyclopedia, which was originally published between 1901-1906.

7) **Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)**— historical overview (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and so forth), as well as ANET (Enuma Elish, Epic of Gilgamesh, Code of Hammurabi, Atrahasis etc…).

8) **Sacred Texts**, Includes ANET, as well as sources for comparative study -- books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric online.

9) **Orion Center For The Study Of The Dead Sea Scrolls** - An invaluable site, which includes a Qumran cave tour, Orion Center DSS Bibliography, and online index of DJD volumes. [http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/index.html](http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/index.html)

10) The Dead Sea Scrolls Project (DSS) and Other Hebrew Manuscripts [http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/scr/](http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/scr/)
11) **Septuagint Studies** (LXX) – new English translation, includes also online resources for the study of the Septuagint: [http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/#res](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/#res)

12) **Resources for the Study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha:** Online
Critical Pseudepigrapha [http://ocp.tyndale.ca/](http://ocp.tyndale.ca/) (original language of extant texts); for English translations see: [http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha](http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha)
Or [http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/](http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/) (includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (also called Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Philo and Josephus)

CDs available:
1) Bible Works – excellent collection of resources (comparative translations, searchable, grammars, lexicons) [http://www.bibleworks.com/](http://www.bibleworks.com/)
2) The Bar Ilan Project – Judaica Responsa (Bible & Rabbinics) [http://www.biu.ac.il/jh/Responsa/books.htm](http://www.biu.ac.il/jh/Responsa/books.htm)
3) Accordance.