FALL SEMESTER

BaMidbar (Bible 400)

Thursday 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. **One Short Reflection Paper (20%)** DUE Nov. 7th. 1000 words (3-5 pages double spaced). Choice of topics to be determined.

3. **Oral Presentation on Secondary Reading** (20%). 10 minute oral presentation of secondary source summarizing the main arguments and position of the scholar.

4. **Research Paper** (50%). Each student will submit one critical essay of 10 - 12 pages (double-spaced, 12 point, 1” margins), including footnotes and bibliography. Possible topics are listed below; alternative topics must be approved by instructor. The paper should be submitted in two stages:
   a) By Thurs. Nov. 14th, you are to submit a detailed (1 page) outline of your paper, with a clear research question, title, and bibliography (5 secondary sources, use “Chicago Manual of Style” – Bibliography & Notes). Your
bibliography must include at least 5 items (in addition to the Bible) – books or Journal articles all relevant to the topic at hand.

b) Since I am restricting the length to 10-12 pages, I expect the quality of argumentation to be high. Be concise and focus your topic. It is worth 30% of your final grade and is due on the date specified below. The paper will be evaluated on the basis of: content, structure and organization, evidence of independent thought, use of primary sources, use of secondary sources, and style/grammar/spelling. The final paper is due during the last week of classes at 9 a.m. **Friday, Dec. 20th.**

1. **Second Week of Classes** (Class 1) **Introduction: The Overall Structure of BeMidbar.**

   Mon. Sept. 23rd  Intro to BeMidbar; Relationship to previous Books; Overall structure; the mix of Law and Narrative; problem of the sources (from P to D).
   
   **Primary Reading:** Ex. 40:34-38; Overview of Book of Numbers
   
   **Secondary Reading:** Milgrom, “Introduction”, pp. xi-xlii.

2. **Third Week** (Class 2): The Census and Encampment.

   Thurs. Oct. 3rd  **ORAL PRESENTATION:**
   
   **Primary Reading:** BeMidbar, chs. 1-3:4 & daf mekorot.
   

3. **Fourth Week** (Class 3) **Sotah**

   Thurs. Oct. 10th  **ORAL PRESENTATION:**
   
   **Primary Reading:** BeMidbar 5:11-31 & daf mekorot.
   

4. **Fifth Week** (Class 4) **A Miscellany of Laws**

   Thurs. Oct. 17th  **ORAL PRESENTATION:**
   
   **Primary Sources:** BeMidbar 6:1-21 and Judges 13 & daf mekorot.
   
5. **Sixth Week** (Class 5) Preparations for Departure; Locative and Counter-locative Traditions on the Ark.

Thurs. Oct. 24th ORAL PRESENTATION __________________________
Primary Sources: BeMidbar 9:1-10:10 & daf mekorot.

FIRST WRITTEN assignment due TODAY!!

6. **Seventh Week** (Class 6) Guidance in the Wilderness; The March from Sinai to Kadesh

Thurs. Oct. 31st ORAL PRESENTATION:________________________
Primary Reading: Num. 10:11-28 & daf mekorot, with guidelines question;

9. **Eight Week** (Class 7) The Complaint Narratives: Taberah and Kirboth-HaTa’avah

Thurs. Nov. 7th ORAL PRESENTATION:________________________
Primary Reading: Num. 11:1-10, 18-23 and 31-35 plus daf mekorot.
Secondary Reading: Milgrom, *Numbers*, Excursus 24 “The Structure of Chapters 11-12” (pp. 376-80).

7. **Ninth Week** (Class 8) Crisis in Leadership (Num. 11:10-17, 24-30)

Thurs. Nov. 14th ORAL PRESENTATION:________________________
Primary Reading: Num. 11:10-17, 24-30 plus daf mekorot.

**Paper Proposal Due Today!!**

8. **Tenth Week** (Class 9) Prophecy in the Wilderness: Miriam, Aaron and Moses

Thurs. Nov. 21st ORAL PRESENTATION: _________________________
Primary Reading: Num 12:1-15 plus daf mekorot.
9. Twelfth Week (Class 10) The Spies’ Report

   Thurs. Dec. 5th ORAL PRESENTATION: ____________________________
   Primary Reading: Numbers 13

10. Thirteenth Week (Class 11) God’s Wrath and Moses’ Intercession

   Thurs. Dec. 12th ORAL PRESENTATION: ____________________________
   Primary Reading: Numbers 14; compare with intercession after sin of the Gold Calf (Exod. 32).

   NO CLASS DURING FINALS WEEK

   Final Paper due Fri. Dec. 20th, at 9 a.m.
Suggested Paper Topics

The Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:22-27)

The Structure of BeMidbar

Census – Forbidden and Permitted

Encampment of the Twelve Tribes

The Tabernacle (Mishkan) & the danger of holy things

Who is the Cushite woman (Num. 12:1)?

Nazir

Sotah

Investiture of Levites

Pesah Sheni

The Uniqueness of Moses as Prophet

The Complaint Narratives

Jethro


B. Levine, Numbers 1-20 (Anchor Bible) New York 1993


Useful URLs

1) **JPS: Tanach** - Hebrew and English
   http://www.breslov.com/bible/

2) Comparing translations. You may access the NRSV on line 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,

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.mssc.huji.ac.il/index.html](http://orion.mssc.huji.ac.il/index.html)
10) The Dead Sea Scrolls Project (DSS) and Other Hebrew Manuscripts
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

Or 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/
3) Accordance.