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FALL SEMESTER
BaMidbar (RB Bible 400)
Tuesday 11:00 – 1:00 pm.

Description

This course on the Book of Numbers (BeMidbar) will focus on crises of leadership in the Wilderness. This is the transitional period of identity formation for the people, from being slaves in Egypt to the formation of a self-determining nation. We will grapple with the complaint narratives, challenges to Moses’ prophecy, the spies report, Korah’s rebellion, and social and legal innovations in settling the Promised Land. We will engage in a wide-range of sources – from Tannaitic Midrash (Sifre) and classic Medieval exegesis to source criticism – with an eye to broadening our reading strategies. Students will also be invited to extend and personalize issues of leadership, in anticipation of their own transition to “Rabbanut.”

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 and midrashic sources, including Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, Meshekh Chokhmah, and others, and BeMidbar Rabbah and Sifre (on Numbers).

- Sensitize ourselves to the literary patterns, feminist perspectives, as well as major themes in the Book of Numbers: 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]
- 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 of a section in *BeMidbar* in the original Hebrew, 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. Because we are a mixed level class, some translation of sources may be supplied (and Havruta sheets will also offer challenges to those who really want to push themselves), however, work on primary sources in the original (Hebrew/Aramaic) will be HIGHLY encouraged.

2. **Three Short Reflection Paper (60%) DUE Oct. 13th, Nov. 17th and Dec. 15th** (respectively) – approx. 1,500 words (3 pages). Choice of topics, guidelines, and reading method to be determined (posted to Schoology).

3. **Oral Presentation** (30%). 25 minute oral presentation (either extended Devar Torah or mini-shiur with *daf mekorot*; with before and after feedback with professor).

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

* Tues. Sept. 8th 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: Overview of Book of Numbers; focus on BeMidbar 9:1-10:28 & daf mekorot.

2. Class 2 (after High Holidays) The First Complaint Narrative
Thurs. Oct. 1st (Tuesday classes on Thursday)
ORAL PRESENTATION:_________________________
Primary Reading: Num. 11 plus daf mekorot.

First Reflection Paper Due Oct. 13th

3. Class 3 (after Sukkot): Prophecy in the Wilderness: Miriam, Aaron and Moses
Tues. Oct. 13th ORAL PRESENTATION:_________________________
Primary Reading: Num 12:1-15 plus daf mekorot.

4. Class 4: The Crisis of the Spies (Meraglim)
Tues. Oct. 20th ORAL PRESENTATION:_________________________
Primary Reading: Numbers 13-14, plus daf mekorot.

5. Class 5: Korah’s Rebellion (Part I) [according to source/redactional criticism]
Tues. Oct. 27th ORAL PRESENTATION:_________________________
Primary Sources: 16:1-27 and skim ch. 17 & daf mekorot.

6. Class 6: Korah’s Rebellion (Part II): The Consequences of Korah’s Rebellion [in Midrash]
Tues. Nov. 3rd ORAL PRESENTATION:_________________________
Primary Sources: as above & daf Mekorot.

7. **Class 7: The Sin of Moshe and Aharon** *(Déjà vu or doublet scenes?)*

   Tues. Nov. 10th ORAL PRESENTATION: ______________________
   Primary Sources: Num. 20:1-13; Exod. 17:1-7 and source sheet.

   **Second Reflection Paper Due Nov. 17th**

8. **Class 8: Balak/Bilam**

   Tues. Nov. 17th: ORAL PRESENTATION: ______________________

   Second Reflection Paper Due Nov. 17th

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   **NO CLASS Nov. 24th**, Rachel at SBL Conference in Atlanta


   Tues. Dec. 1st: ORAL PRESENTATION: ______________________
   Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 61, “The Apostasy of Baal-Peor”.

10. **Class 10: The Initiative to Settle East of the Jordan**

    Tues. Dec. 8th: ORAL PRESENTATION: ______________________
    Primary Sources: Num. 32:1-42 and Joshua chs. 21-22 (in English, for gist) & daf mekorot.
    Secondary Reading: Milgrom, Excursus 69, “The Literary Structure of Chapter 32.”

    **Final Reflection Paper Due Dec. 15th**

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    **No Class Dec. 15th**, FINALS WEEK, Rachel at AJS Conference, Boston

11. **Class 11: The Daughters of Zelophchad**

    Tues. Dec. 22nd: ORAL PRESENTATION: ______________________
    Primary Sources: Num. 27:1-11; 36:1-13, and Josh. 17:3-6; Modern Midrash from *Dirshuni*.
Suggested Topics for Presentations and Papers

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

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

Tzitzit

Parah Adumah (The Law of the Red Heifer) (Num. 19)

The Copper Serpents (Num. 21)

HaMa’apilim (Num. 14:40-45)

The meqoshesh ‘etzim (wood gatherer) (Num. 15:23-36)

Investiture of Levites

Pesah Sheni

Jethro

The Ark

The Inverted NUNs

A People that Dwells Alone (from Balaam’s Prophecy)

Cities of Refuge

Miriam’s Well
Bibliography


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. To compare translations see:
   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/

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

3) 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
   http://www.mechon-mamre.org/

5) Glossary of Basic Terms in Judaism 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…).
   http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook1.asp
   http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.asp

8) **Sacred Texts**, includes ANET, as well as sources for comparative study -- books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric online.
   http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm

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.msc.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](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/#res)

   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/)
3) Accordance.

13) Sefaria for preparing source sheets (a “Living Library of Jewish Texts”)

 **Resources for Divrei Torah or Papers:**

ADD YOUR OWN…..