How Jews Read the Bible: Introduction to Rabbinic Midrash

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan
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Office hours during term: T,W, Th 1:00-6:00 pm & by appointment

Course Description: Midrash is a Hebrew word for “Biblical interpretation.” Over the centuries, Jewish interpreters have used close reading, Hebrew wordplay, and generous imagination to recover legends, address theological questions, define ritual practices, and adapt to social trends while preserving historical continuity. Through our study of midrash, we will expand our understanding of Hebrew Bible’s complexity, spirituality, and homiletic potential. We will touch on halachic (practical) midrash, but will focus on aggadic (narrative) midrash.

Competence Objectives: Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- Explain basic features of a variety of historical Jewish styles of Biblical exegesis, including classical, medieval, Hassidic, feminist
- Recognize and decode basic structures of classical rabbinic midrash, e.g., mashal, petichta, extended narrative
- Engage in close literary reading of the Book of Genesis, raising appropriate literary and theological questions
- Create original midrash in one or more of the styles studied in class

Format: Fall term 2018, Wednesdays 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm, Course activities include lecture, discussion, small group activities, and one required field trip.

Prerequisites: HB 500, “Introduction to Hebrew Bible.”

Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

Required reading:

Books: Please acquire through Amazon.ca, Abebooks Canada, or the library

- Genesis. Any translation; bring a Hebrew edition if you can read Hebrew phonetically.
Chapters and Articles: To be posted on Canvas

Primary sources:

- A selection of short midrashic texts from Midrash Rabbah, Talmud, and other classical sources.

Secondary sources:


Blog Posts: To be accessed on-line

- Duhan-Kaplan, Laura. www.sophiastreet.com, a selection of posts on “Torah,” TBA

Assignments:

For all students:
- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities

Additional for all Certificate, Diploma, and Degree students:
- Thoughtful completion of assigned readings
- Two 500-word analyses of a short Biblical text (selected by the instructor), raising questions in a midrashic style, and proposing answers in accordance with a specific midrashic approach
- One 750-word analysis of a short classical midrashic text, identifying techniques used, and possible conclusions implied

Additional for Basic-level degree students (MATS, M.Div, MAPPL, MAIIS):
- A 3000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving research (10 sources) beyond the assigned course readings.
Additional for Advanced-level degree students (Th.M.):

- A 4000-word final paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating course competencies, and involving significant research (10 sources) beyond the course readings.

**Selected bibliography:**


