

HB6/707 (3) 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 2022, Thursdays 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 the VST Library, Amazon.ca, or Abebooks Canada

- Duhan-Kaplan, *Mouth of the Donkey: Re-imagining Biblical Animals*. Eugene OR: Cascade, 2021.
- Cherry, Shai. *Torah Through Time: Understanding Bible Commentary from the Rabbinic Period to Modern Times*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2007.
- Peters, Simi. *Learning to Read Midrash*. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2005.
- *Genesis*. Any translation; bring a Hebrew edition if you can read Hebrew phonetically.

Chapters and Articles: To be posted on Populi

Primary sources:

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

Secondary sources:

- Alter, Robert. "A Literary Approach to the Bible." *Commentary Magazine*, December 1, 1975.
- Drinkwater, Gregg. "Joseph's Fabulous Technicolor Dreamcoat" in *Torah Queeries*, ed. Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Schneer.
- Holtz, Barry W. "Midrash" in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (Toronto: Simon & Schuster), 1984.
- Pardes, Ilana. "Rachel's Dream: The Female Subplot" in *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1993.
- Zornberg, Aviva. "Dispersions" in *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books), 1995.

Blog Posts: To be accessed on-line

- Duhan-Kaplan, Laura. www.sophiastreet.com, a selection of posts TBA

Assignments:

Note: Please email written assignments to the instructor in *editable* ms word format.

For all students:

- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities

Required of all students (except auditors):

- 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.
- Please note: due dates for these short assignments will be specified on the syllabus.

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 (5 sources) beyond the assigned course readings. Due December 16, 2022.

Additional for Advanced-level degree students (Th.M., Grad.Dip.):

- 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. Due January 16, 2022.

Selected bibliography:

Alter, Judah A. *The Language of Truth*, trans. Arthur Green. Philadelphia, PH: Jewish Publication Society, 2012.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011.

Armstrong, Karen. *The Bible: A Biography* (Grove Press), 2008.

Baskin, Judith R. *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002)

Berlin, Adele. *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 1994.

Brettler, Marc Zvi. *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005.

Brown, Brian Arthur. *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield), 2012.

Cherry, Shai. *Torah Through Time: Understanding Bible Commentary from the Rabbinic Period to Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 2007.

Coward, Harold. *Scripture in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications), 2000.

Edinger, Edward F. *The Bible and the Psyche: Individuation Symbolism in the Old Testament* (*Studies in Jungian Psychology no 24*). Toronto, ON, Canada: Inner City Books, 1986.

Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007.

Fishbane, Michael, ed. *Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

Freedman, Harry and Maurice Simon. *Midrash Rabbah*. Hindhead, Surrey, UK: Soncino Press, 1992

Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1909. [Reprinted many times since then.]

- Gold, Shefa. *Torah Journeys* (Teaneck NJ: Ben Yehuda Press), 2006.
- Goldstein, Elyse, ed. *The Women's Torah Commentary*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.
- Green, Arthur. *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003
- Holtz, Barry, ed., *Back to the Sources* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1984.
- JPS Guide: The Jewish Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 2008.
- Kugel, James L. *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press), 1999.
- Levine, Amy Jill and Marc Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2011.
- Locks, Gutman. *The Spice of Torah – Gematria* (New York: Judaica Press), 1985.
- Neusner, Jacob. *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1999.
- Pardes, Ilana. *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1993.
- Peters, Simi. *Learning to Read Midrash* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications), 2005.
- Prothero, Stephen. *God is Not One* (New York: HarperOne), 2011.
- Slater, Jonathan, *A Partner in Holiness, Vol. 1, Genesis and Exodus*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2014.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *The Woman's Bible*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press), 1993. Originally published 1895.
- Wolfe-Blank, David. *Metaparshiyot* (privately published).
- Yarchin, William. *History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2004
- Zornberg, Aviva Gottlieb. *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*. New York, NY: Jewish Publication Society, 1996
- Zetterholm, Karin Hedner. *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 2012.