

International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism
Summer 2012
Jewish History Seminar: Rabbinics through Medieval – JH 521-522

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Overview

Books:

Full scholarly Bible, i.e., Tanakh *and* New Testament. Scholarly editions are helpful (*Harper Collins Study Bible, Oxford Study Bible, etc.*), but all translations welcome. Smartphone/Kindle/iPad Bible apps are fine.

My goal is to cover a unit a day, but I've left the last day free so that we can "run over" with topics, if necessary, and also know that we have time to cover whatever questions may arise in the course of our study. Throughout I will strive to present as many primary sources as possible in the time allotted, while introducing various scholarly approaches. Most days include a mix of primary and secondary sources, some introduce primary sources from within the secondary, and occasionally we have all-primary readings.

Syllabus

Unit 1: Mishnah

Historical background; rabbis and priests; rabbinic literature and the problem of canonicity.

Primary: Mishnah Avot 1, Mishnah Berakhot 1, Mishnah Sotah.
Secondary: Gafni, "The Historical Background"; Charlotte Fonrobert, "Regulating the Human Body: Rabbinic Legal Discourse and the Making of Jewish Gender."

Unit 2: Midrash Halakhah

The legal midrashim; the Schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael; midrash and *halakhah* as competing models of authority.

Primary&Secondary: Chapters Three and Four of Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash*; Azzan Yadin-Israel, "Rabbi Akiva and the Site of Revelation."

Unit 3: Midrash Aggadah

The aggadic midrashim; aggadah as philology and as folk literature

Primary: Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, Chapter 8
Secondary: Barry Holtz, "Midrash," in idem. (ed.), *Back to the Sources*

Unit 4: Talmud (Bavli)

The shift from Palestine to Babylonia; the formation and scope of the Babylonian Talmud

Primary&Secondary: Jeffrey Rubenstein, “Torah, Shame, and the Oven of Akhnai,” and “Torah and the Mundane Life.”

Unit 5: The New Testament as Jewish Literature

The New Testament and the problem of canonicity; Jesus and Paul.

Primary (Gospels): Luke 13:10-17; Luke 14:3-5; Matthew 12.1 (Mark 11.23, Luke 6.1—note differences) [Law]; Mark 7:9-13, 11:15-17; Matthew 17:24-27, 5:23-24 [the Temple]; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13 (and note Mark 1:12-13) [Torah].

Secondary: Geza Vermes, “Jesus and Charismatic Judaism”

Primary (Paul): Acts 15; Galatians 1; 2 Corinthians 11; Romans 2.

Secondary: J.D.G Dunn, “Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?”

Unit 6: Jewish Philosophy, Philo and Maimonides

Reason and Revelation; philosophy and biblical exegesis

Primary: Philo, “On the Life of Moses”; Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3.32.

Secondary: Borgen, “Philo”; Maimonides article TBA

Unit 7: God’s Body

Notion of God’s body

Primary (biblical): Genesis 1; Genesis 9:6-7; Exodus 20; Exodus 33; Ezekiel 1; Isaiah 6;

Primary (rabbinic): Mekhilta Bahodesh; Mekhilta Shirata; Leviticus Rabbah; Avot de Rabbi Nathan

Primary (post-rabbinic): Shiur Qomah

Unit 8: Yetzira and Bahir

Late antique Jewish mysticism and the origins of Kabbalah

Primary: Sefer Yetzirah 1.1-1.7; *Sefer ha-Bahir* parables §§9, 16, 34-35, 54, 63, 76, 92-93, 129-133.

Secondary: Joseph Dan, “The Language of Creation and its Grammar”

Unit 9: Zohar

Primary: Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 1.59; Zohar I.15a; Zohar 1.1b; Zohar *va-Year* (continuous).

Unit 10: Summary and Overview

An overview of the material covered; issues raised during previous classes but not properly addressed; time for questions and discussion.