

Studies in Rabbinic Literature
AMES/JWST 258
Fall 1998

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Introduction to Midrash

The aim of this course is to learn to read midrash, the literature of classical Rabbinic Biblical interpretation, and to study the literary, historical, and cultural context in which it came into existence. We will be primarily concerned with two questions: 1) How did the Rabbis read the Bible? and 2) What can midrash, as a form of literary discourse in its own right, tell us about its authors, the Rabbinic sages who lived in the first five centuries in the common era? We will also compare midrash to other types of ancient Jewish interpretation and look briefly at its place in the history of later Jewish Biblical exegesis.

Requirements: 1) active class participation; 2) several short interpretive exercises, including an imitation of a midrashic literary form, and one longer paper to be handed in during the final exam period.

The class will also have a listserv, and every student will be expected to post at least one or two summaries of class(es). Beyond this, how active the listserv will be depends largely upon you. I encourage you all to use it to extend class discussion into the wee hours of the morning (when I will be fast asleep), to ask questions, record objections and responses, make jokes about the class and instructor, etc. etc.

Readings: All texts for the course, including both primary and secondary sources, will be found in a Bulkpack that can be purchased at Campus Copy on Walnut between 39th and 40th St.

PLEASE BRING A HEBREW BIBLE TO CLASS EVERY SESSION.

Syllabus

1) Sept. 10-- introduction

I. Midrash as Commentary

2-3) Sept. 15 and 17 --

Exodus 17:8-16.

Mekhilta Amalek (Lauterbach ed. Vol. II) 1:1- 177 (pp. 135-47): **MEKHILTA CITATIONS ARE BY CHAPTER AND LINE NUMBER.**

Mekhilta de-Rashbi, pp. 118-22.

David Stern, "Midrash" and "Aggadah" from Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, ed. A.A. Cohen and P. Mendes-flohr, pp. 613-20.

James Kugel, The Bible As It Was, pp. 1-42; 364-67; 202-203.

Sept. 22-- ROSH HASHANA-- No Class. Make-up on Sept. 23 or Sep. 25.

4-5) Sept. 23/25 and 24--

Daniel Boyarin, "Analogy Vs. Anomaly in Midrashic Hermeneutic," JAOS 106 (1986), 659-67.

Targum Yonathan (Rieder ed.), pp. 108-9, 130-31

Philo, "On Moses," 387-391

Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, pp. 67-69

Shemot Rabbah 26:2-3 (ed. Mirkin, pp. 288-90)

ASSIGNMENT: look up all references to Amalek episode in Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews.

II. The Literary Forms of Midrash

6-7) Sept. 29 and Oct. 1-- Lists and Enumerations

W.S. Towner, The Rabbinic "Enumeration of Scriptural Examples": A Study of a Rabbinic Pattern of Discourse (Leiden, 1973), pp. 14-23; 66-71; 76-80, 86-117

Mekhilta Vayassa' 6: 53-64 (II: 124-25)

Ber. R. 65:12

Mekhilta Nezikin 6:37-46 (III: 53-54).

Amalek 1: 103-113 (pp. 142-43) For text, see Mekhilta section above.

Vayikra Rabbah 7:6 (pp. 84-85)

Oct. 6 and Oct. 13-- SUKKOT and SIMHAT TORAH-- No Class. Make-up class as trip to Rare Book Library at the Center for Judaic Studies to be arranged.

8-9) Oct. 8 and 15-- The Petihta (Proem)

J. Heinemann, "The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim," in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22, ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, 100-111.

Ber. R. 4:1 (p. 26)

3:3 (p.21)

8:1 (pp. 49-51)

60:1 (pp. 302-303)

Vay. R. 1:5 (pp. 13-14)

10-11) Oct. 20 and 22-- The Mashal (Parable)

Eikha R. 4:11 (2 versions)

Sanhedrin 108a

Ber.R. 28:6

10:9

9:4

Cf. David Stern, "Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the Mashal," Prooftexts 1(1981): 261-91.

Daniel Boyarin and David Stern, "Exchange on the Mashal," in Prooftexts 5 (1985) 269-80.

Eikhah R. 1:1C

1:21

- 12-13) Oct. 27 and 29-- The Ma'aseh (Anecdote and Sage-Story)
 Story of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai (Sefer Ha'aggadah, pp. 143-44)
 Story of R. Akiba Consoling the Rabbis (p. 151)
 Story of R. Joshua b. Hananiah and the Captive Boy (p. 174)
- 14-15) Nov. 3 and 5-- HaSippur Hadarshani (Extra-Biblical Legend)
 Deut. 33:2
 Targum Yonatan
 Targum Yerushalmi
 Mekhilta Bahodesh 5: 63-92 (Lauterbach III: 234-36)
 Shemot Rabbah 27.9
 Eikhah R. 3:1
 Joseph Heinemann, "The Literature of the Aggadah," in Midrash and Literature, pp. 41-55.
- 16-17) Nov. 10 and 12-- The Homiletical Midrash
 Vayikra Rabbah 16 (Metzora), with English translation by J. Neusner (see below).
 J. Heinemann, "Profile of a Midrash," JAAR 39 (1971), 141-50.
 Jacob Neusner, Judaism and Scripture: The Evidence of Leviticus Rabbah (Chicago: 1986), 130-36; 327-39.

III. Midrash in Its Contexts

- 18-19) Nov. 17 and 19-- The Sources of Midrash
 Michael Fishbane, "Torah and Tradition," in Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament, ed. D.A. Knight (Philadelphia: 1977)
 Jeffrey Tigay, "An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis," in History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: 1983), pp.169-89.
 Saul Lieberman, "Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture," in Hellenism in Jewish Palestine (New York:1950), pp.47-82.
- 20-21) Nov. 24 and Dec. 1-- The Hermeneutics of Midrash
 Eikhah R. 3:21
 David Stern, "The Rabbinic Parable and the Narrative of Interpretation," in M. Fishbane, The Midrashic Imagination, 78-95.
 Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah," Critical Inquiry, 16 (1990), 532-50.
- 22-23-24) Dec. 3, 8, 10--
 To be determined. .