

How the Bible Became Holy
JUDS 0682
Fall, 2019
CRN: 16769

No book in human history has exercised as much influence as the Bible. Over the past 2,000 years, people have killed and died for the Bible, and it continues to exercise a powerful if contested role in modern politics. Yet how did it achieve this power? This course will trace the development of both the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament from their origins to their development as foundational texts for Jews and Christians. The focus will be on how Jews and early Christians throughout antiquity understood and ascribed authority to the Bible.

This is a DPLL and WRIT designated course.

Goals

By the end of the semester, you should:

1. Be familiar with the general contents of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament;
2. Have a better understanding of how these texts were viewed in antiquity;
3. Know the general historical narrative of the Israelites/Jews and Christians in antiquity;
4. Be able to identify the major sources behind that narrative and some of the issues involved in their interpretation;
5. Be more sensitized to issues of authority more generally, particularly the ways in which texts are used as authoritative;
6. Be a more sensitive reader of texts generally;
7. Have improved your writing

Instructor

Professor Michael Satlow, Religious Studies and Judaic Studies. Office: 163 George St. Email: Michael_Satlow@Brown.edu. Phone: (401) 863-3911. My office hours are posted online (they change regularly in order to accommodate differing schedules), but I am generally available Thursdays, from 1-3 PM. The location will change. Please sign up at <https://bit.ly/2Znn5Uh> (link also on our Canvas site) by 8 AM of the morning you want the appointment and I'll contact you with location information.

I strongly advise you come see me early in the semester, even if you think that you have nothing to discuss. You will be more engaged in the course and I will be more effective if we have had at least one private conversation. If you are uncomfortable meeting with your professors, don't be! You might want to read this article about getting the most out of college: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/opinion/college-students.html>.

I seek to cultivate a classroom of mutual respect, seriousness, and inclusiveness. Should you need accommodations, or if there is anything else that I can do to help you to thrive in this class, please talk to me early in the semester.

Resources

You should bring a Bible to class nearly every meeting. We will be using the New Revised Standard Version translation. The New Oxford Annotated edition has very good explanatory notes, so I highly recommend it. We will be reading books (2) and (3) in their entirety. I have ordered all of them at the bookstore but they will also be on reserve in the library.

1. *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (ISBN: 978-0195289602)
2. William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (ISBN: 978-0521536226)
3. Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book* (ISBN: 978-0674661127)
4. David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews, Volume 1* (ISBN: 978-0805212006)

Readings available through our course reserve are marked with an asterisk (*). Our OCRA class password is Bible.

We will be using Canvas.

Laptop and Electronic Device Policy

I have long been conflicted about allowing the use of electronic devices in my classroom. I have lately become more convinced that the use of such devices detract more than they add to your education and also can serve as a distraction for others. Accordingly, **I am not permitting their use in class**. Should you have an accessibility issue, please let me know at the beginning of the semester.

Be aware: since many of our readings are online, you are responsible for **printing them all out and bringing them to each class**, as we will frequently discuss and refer to them. Budget accordingly.

Requirements and Evaluation

1. Attendance and participation
2. Discussion posts (20%). Most weeks you will have to complete a discussion post by Sunday night. These posts should be 2-3 paragraphs (about 300 words) and should help you to synthesize what we learned in the previous week. They should reflect engagement with the readings.
3. Paper (about 1700 words) (20%). This assignment is connected to our Ezra simulation and will be assigned for peer review. The draft is due on **October 13**, the peer reviews must be completed by **October 16**, and the final paper submitted on **October 20**.
4. Take-home Midterm (30%). This is a paper (about 2000 words) on a choice of prompts that will help you to synthesize the course to date. It is due on **November 17**.

5. Final Simulation (20%). Attendance and participating in the Final Simulation is mandatory in order to pass this course. This will take place during our normally assigned examination slot, Monday, **December 16**, at 2 PM. There will be a few short writing assignments (group and individual) associated with the final simulation exercise. These are all due by **December 17**.
6. Quiz (10%). There will be a quiz on basic terms and dates from the course that will be given at some point in the semester (warning will be given). It may be given online, but it will be a closed-book exam.
7. Self-evaluation. This is due on **December 17**. More detailed instructions will be provided.

There is also an alternative grading policy that will be explained in class.

Please note that these deadlines are not negotiable. Extensions and incompletes will be given only for extraordinary reasons. Any violations of Brown's Academic Code will result in failure from the class and referral to the Dean's office, if appropriate.

Time Expectations

The following "good faith" estimate of time expectations is required on all Brown syllabi by the Dean of the College:

Our accrediting agency requires an expectation of 180 hours of coursework in order to receive four credit hours. This figure will be reached in this class through the following expectations:

- (1) Class meeting: 39 hours;
- (2) Reading for class (8 hours/week * 13 weeks): 104 hours
- (3) Writing assignments: 33 hours

Tentative Schedule

I reserve the right to modify this schedule as necessary. Assignments are explained in more detail on our Canvas site. In the case of conflict between the syllabus and Canvas, Canvas always take precedence unless I say otherwise. Note that we will not meet during Reading Week.

September 5	Introduction
September 10	<p>Before the Bible: Academic and Non-Academic Approaches What do we know of some of the earliest history of the Israelites and how do we know it?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For an introduction to academic approaches to religion, and how it differs from non-academic approaches, watch the short video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6_ARMEhk5A&t=339s 2. Read Exodus 1-15. This is the primary evidence that exists for the Israelite Exodus from Egypt.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Read Israel Finkelstein, "The Patriarchs, Exodus, and Conquest Narratives in Light of Archaeology"*. How does Finkelstein read the Exodus narrative? Why? 4. Read Richard Elliot Friedman, <i>The Exodus</i>, 27-83*. How does Friedman read the Exodus narrative? How would he respond to Finkelstein?
September 12	<p>Scribes The Hebrew Bible in the form that we have it was composed and edited by scribes. What do we know about scribes in ancient Judah and Israel?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read <i>How the Bible Became a Book</i>, pp. 1-63. What does it mean to be a "scribe" in the Ancient Near East? What do we know about the biblical scribes and the scope of literacy? 2. Read 2 Kings 18. What is the role of scribes? 3. Read Proverbs 16-25. What makes a "proverb"? For whom do you think that they were written? 4. Recommended: van der Toorn, <i>Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible</i>, 27-108*
September 17	<p>Prophecy The major continuing path of communication between God and humans was prophecy. There are several different kinds of prophecies and prophets in the Bible.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Amos; Isaiah 1; Ezekiel 1-2; Jeremiah 1, 36; 1 Kings 17-22 <p>How did one become a prophet? What did a prophet do? Were prophetic oracles written down, and if so, by whom and for what reason?</p> <p>We will have a visitor to conduct today's class, Professor Hindy Najman from Oxford University. To learn more about her, see https://www.orient.ox.ac.uk/people/professor-hindy-najman</p>
September 19	<p>Israel The Bible is thought to have originated in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. But we know about Israel only through the lens of texts that were redacted in Judah.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For an overview, read Satlow, <i>How the Bible Became Holy</i>, chapter 1* 2. Read Genesis 12-37. Think of these chapters as myth. What could be the purpose of such a myth? 3. Read 1 Kings 12-13 (can you separate the "original" story from its retelling?) on the formation of the Northern Kingdom 4. Read 2 Kings 9-10

September 24	<p>Judah Much of the Hebrew Bible either originates in Judah or, as we saw last class, is told through the lens of Judah and Jerusalem. What was the impact of the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem on the development of authoritative texts?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read <i>How the Bible Became a Book</i>, pp. 64-164 2. Read 2 Kings 18-23 on Kings Hezekiah and Josiah. Pay attention to the role of the “book of the law.” What was that book and where did it come from? 3. Read, Shanks, “Will King Hezekiah Be Dislodged from His Tunnel?”* 4. Read Deuteronomy. We will return to this book in the next class. For the purposes of this class, pay attention to the question of whether it is coherent. How is it framed? Who might have written it and for what purpose?
September 26	<p>The Torah Most scholars today see the Torah as edited, or even composed, during the “Exile” of the royal court in Persia. In this class we will focus on the evidence for these claims and the “Documentary Hypothesis.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare Deuteronomy 16-17; Exodus 23:12-17; and Leviticus 23. What do you think is the relationship between these texts? 2. Read Genesis 1-3. Is this a coherent narrative? 3. Read Genesis 6-10. Is this a coherent narrative? 4. Read Joel Baden, <i>The Composition of the Pentateuch</i>, pp. 1-44*
October 1	Canceled: Rosh Hashanah
October 3	<p>Exile and Return Was the Persian government responsible for making the Torah authoritative? Was the Torah authoritative to the restored community?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read <i>How the Bible Became a Book</i>, pp. 165-213 2. Read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Note that most scholars believe that Nehemiah 8-9 are misplaced and really belong in the book of Ezra 3. We will begin work on a simulation exercise that we will conduct next class
October 8	<p>Ezra Simulation exercise. Instructions to be provided.</p>
October 10	Hellenism

	<p>“Hellenism” refers to the complex cultural package that spread (in different forms) in the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquest. What did this mean for the Jews and their texts?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Erich Gruen, “Hellenistic Judaism,” in <i>Cultures of the Jews</i> (ch. 3) 2. Read Ecclesiastes. What is the central argument of this book? Did the author know the Torah? 3. Read Sirah, Prologue, 1, 9-10, 35, 44:23 to the end of the book. Compare Ecclesiastes to Ecclesiasticus.
October 15	<p>Apocalypticism</p> <p>The Hellenistic Period generated a number of apocalyptic writings. But what is an “apocalypse” and how might it have functioned in its day?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For background, read John Collins, <i>The Apocalyptic Imagination</i>, chapters 1-3* 2. Read Genesis 6:1-4 and 1 Enoch 1-16*. Does the author of 1 Enoch know Genesis? 3. Daniel. Is Daniel coherent? What do imagine is the context behind the apocalyptic visions?
October 17	<p>Ancient Jewish Novels</p> <p>A variety of texts, some of which made it into the Hebrew Bible and some of which did not, were authored during the Hellenistic period. For this class we will read and discuss two of them, found in the Apocrypha.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Tobit 2. Read Judith <p>What characterizes the “Jewishness” or piety of the characters in these novellas?</p>
October 22	<p>The Maccabean Revolt and the Beginning of Jewish Sectarianism</p> <p>After more than a century under Hellenistic rulers, the Judeans revolted in 167 BCE. The revolt, which established an independent kingdom under the Hasmoneans, reshaped religious life. What caused the revolt, and what role did scripture play in the new kingdom?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read 2 Maccabees. In a sentence or two, according to this author, what caused the revolt? Do you think the author is telling the truth? 2. Read John Ma, “Re-examining Hanukkah”* 3. The following two excerpts by the Jewish historian Josephus describe, for the first time in his long narratives, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Who were these groups? What was their stance toward scripture, and why (in your opinion)? <i>Antiquities</i>

	<p>Book 13, chapter 10.5-6 (288-300)*; <i>Jewish War</i> Book 2, chapter 8.2-14 (119-166)*</p> <p>4. Who, according to Josephus, were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes? How did they originate?</p>
October 24	<p>Jubilees</p> <p>Jubilees seems to have been important in antiquity. Today, it survives and is read in the Ethiopic Church and is part of the Pseudepigrapha. What is it and why is it important?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For general background, read Eric Meyers, "Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine," in <i>Cultures of the Jews</i>, pp. 135-180 2. Read Jubilees 1-6, 22, 30. What is the relationship between Jubilees and Scripture? What is Jubilees' calendar and stance toward non-Jews? For whom do you think it was written and why?
October 29	<p>The "Diaspora"</p> <p>There were Jews throughout the Mediterranean basin. Their political situation was different. How did this play a role in their approach to Scripture?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read Louis Feldman, "Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism," in <i>Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism</i>, pp. 1-43* for an overview 2. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Torah (and then the rest of the Hebrew Bible), played an important role in some of these communities. For background, read Timothy Law, <i>When God Spoke Greek</i>, pp. 33-57*. Then read the entire Letter of Aristeas* (remember to click to continue to the Letter), a document that "authorizes" the Septuagint 3. For an example of how some Jews in antiquity approached the Bible, read Philo, <i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> I.I-VII*. How is Philo's approach different from that Jubilees?
October 31	<p>Dead Sea Scrolls</p> <p>The Dead Sea Scrolls contain some of our earliest manuscripts of the Bible, and extensive evidence for how this community read and ascribed authority to it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the following selections from the Dead Sea Scrolls: <i>Serekh ha-Yahad</i> *; <i>A Commentary on Nahum</i>*; <i>The Last Days: A Commentary on Selected Verses</i>*. What kind of community was this? How did they read Scripture and understand messianism?
November 5	<p>The Historical Jesus</p> <p>We know surprisingly little about the historical Jesus. How do we separate the truth from the myth? What relationship to Scripture was Jesus likely to have had?</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read E. P. Sanders, "The Life of Jesus," in <i>Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism</i>, pp. 45-92*, for background 2. Read the Gospel of Mark, thought to be the earliest of the Gospels. How can we tell what is true and what is created by its author?
November 7	<p>Paul We also know little about Paul, although several of his own letters survive. What is Paul's stance toward Scripture?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Book of Acts purports to give a history of the growth of the early Christian movement. Read it. Pay attention to how it portrays Paul. 2. Paul's stance to "the law" (Scripture?) is complex. Read the Letter to the Galatians and Romans 1-12. Do they cohere?
November 12	<p>Christians and the Law Early Christians had to position themselves between "Romans" and "Jews." What were they? There was a lot at stake in this discussion.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For background, read https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/wrestling.html. 2. Read Luke 1-3. Compare it to Matthew 1-3. How are these accounts similar and different? How do their authors understand the relationship of Jesus to Scripture? 3. Read Matthew 5. What is Jesus's relationship to Scripture? 4. Read the Letter of James. How does the view of this author compare to that of Paul? 5. Read the Gospel of Thomas*, a "gnostic" text. What is Jesus's relationship to Scripture here?
November 14	<p>Toward Canonization Scripture did not always play an important role in Christian life. In this class we look at the role that it played in different early Christian communities and the later movement toward canonization.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For background, read Lee McDonald, <i>The Biblical Canon</i>, pp. 285-322* 2. Read Justin Martyr, 1 Apology 31, 67* 3. Read Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresy</i>, 3.11*
November 19	<p>The Rabbis and Midrash The rabbis had a very different approach to Scripture than did Christians. This is most clearly seen in their development of midrash, a particularly rabbinic way of reading the Bible.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For background, read Irshai, "Confronting a Christian Empire," in <i>Cultures of the Jews</i>, and Barry Holtz, "Midrash"*

	<p>2. Read the Midrash* excerpts. What is the “method” of Midrash? What does it reveal about the way that the rabbis regard Scripture?</p>
November 21	<p>Rabbinic Canonization Jews never actually formally “canonized” the Hebrew Bible, but they did develop an “implicit” canon. How?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For background, read Brettler, “The Canonization of the Bible”* 2. For one approach to this answer, read Satlow, <i>How the Bible Became Holy</i>, chapter 15 3. The rabbinic approach to Scripture is often couched in the language of the physical defilement of the texts. Read Goodman, “Sacred Scripture and ‘Defiling the Hands’”* 4. Finally, we will look at a rabbinic text*, that discusses which (sacred) texts are allowed to be saved from a burning building on the Sabbath
November 26	<p>Scripture and Authority This class will be devoted to a discussion of a single book, Moshe Halbertal, <i>People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority</i>.</p>
November 28	Canceled: University Holiday
December 3	<p>Simulation Preparations Guidelines will be provided.</p>
December 5	Simulation Preparations
December 16, 2-5 PM	Final Simulation