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Bible 5826x
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Classical Jewish Biblical Exegesis

Objectives of the Course

This course is an introduction to medieval Jewish biblical exegesis. During the semester students will concentrate on: a) developing skills in reading medieval commentaries (comprehension and recitation will be stressed!); b) understanding the methodologies and exegetical goals of each exegete; c) gaining an appreciation for the commentators in their own historical context.

Requirements of the Course

1. Preparation for class, recitation and participation in class discussions [30% of final grade]. Students should prepare the assigned texts for each class, using the following guidelines:
 - a. After checking the Scriptural context of the assigned verses, the student should carefully read the verse or part of the verse which the commentator is addressing.
 - b. The student should study the commentary with the aid of a dictionary, אוצר ראשי תבונה, etc., and finally English translation if available and necessary. However, don't go the translation first! (During the course of the semester, I will call your attention to various translations of these texts).
 - c. Look up, and write in the correct vocalization of, any Biblical verse which the commentator cites.
 - d. Practice reading the commentary aloud, and becoming familiar with the language.
 - e. Summarize each commentary according to its contents and methodology.
2. Mid-term [20% of final grade]. The exam will consist of 1–2 texts to translate, with additional questions asked regarding each text. Details about the exam will be distributed one week prior to the test.
3. Written Assignment [20% of final grade]. Details will be distributed some time after the beginning of the semester.

4. Final exam [30% of final grade]. Although the exam will consist primarily of texts to translate, it will pertain also to historical and methodological concerns. A study guide for the final will be distributed towards the end of the semester.

Hevruta: Students are expected to form study groups to review materials and to practice reading aloud among peers.

Reading Material

Students are required to bring to each class:

1. A Hebrew Bible; I recommend the small Koren edition for the clarity of its typeface, its convenient size, and its low cost. The NJPS Hebrew-English Tanakh is not permitted.

2. A Miqra'ot Gedolot and/or copies of the assigned commentaries for the day. I have posted a "course reader" of all texts on blackboard; you should print out a copy for yourself, even if you choose to purchase a miqra'ot gedolot of your own.

***Please note: no English Bibles or translations of commentaries may be brought to class. I encourage you to write brief notes and/or translations of difficult words in your texts, but do not write down full English translations.

Recommended Editions

The best edition is the מקראות גדולות הכתר, published by Bar Ilan University Press, on all available texts (two volumes on Genesis; one on Exodus; one each for Joshua-Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel; and two on Psalms). For other texts (i.e., Exodus–Deuteronomy), students may consult the תורת היים edition of the Miqra'ot Gedolot, published by Mossad Harav Kook, or the מקראות גדולות המאור (note: not the מאורות edition!).

Secondary readings are available in the Library's online e-reserves.

Sessions: September 10, 17, 24; October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; November 5, 12, 19; December 3, 10.

UNITS

Unit #1 (September 10, 17): Introduction to the course: Peshat and Derash; The Mikraot Gedolot

Required Reading:

1. Edward L. Greenstein, "Medieval Bible Commentaries," in Barry Holtz [ed.], *Back to the Sources*, pp. 213–259.
2. Avraham Grossman, "The School of Literal Exegesis in Northern France" *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300). Part 2: The Middle Ages*, ed. M. Saebo. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000, pp. 321-371. ***Note: further reference to this volume in the syllabus will be indicated as "Saebo."

Commentaries: Bereshit Rabba and Rashi on Genesis 4:8; R. Yosef Kara on 1 Samuel 1:17; Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Rashbam on Exodus 13:9.

Unit #2 (September 24; October 1, 8): RASHI

Required Reading:

1. Edward L. Greenstein, "Sensitivity to Language in Rashi's Commentary on the Torah." In *The Solomon Goldman Lectures*, edited by Mayer I. Gruber. Chicago: The Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1993, 51-71.
2. Robert A. Harris, *Discerning Parallelism: a Study in Northern French Medieval Jewish Biblical Exegesis*. Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2004, 15–34.

Commentaries:

1. Genesis 3:8 (memorize the part of this comment dealing with methodology!).
2. Genesis 8:7 ("ד"ה" עד יבשת המים); Genesis 12:5 ("ד"ה" אשר עשו בחרן); Genesis 33:20 (entire comment).

In addition to translating these selections, be able to answer the question: מה קשה לרש"י. Also,

attempt to articulate to yourself what Rashi considers to be the relationship is between “peshuto shel mikra” (i.e., his attempt to understand a contextual meaning of the passage) and “midrash” (the earlier, Rabbinic understanding) in these comments.

3. Genesis 1:1
4. Genesis 21:1, 9
5. Genesis 20:13; 22:1–2
6. Genesis 6:9 (“ד”ה “בדורותיו” ו“את האלהים התאלך נח”)
7. Exodus 21:1–6, 12–13
8. Exodus 15:6; compare Rashbam on the same text
9. Exodus 15:1

Unit #2 (October 15, 22): R. SAMUEL BEN MEIR (RASHBAM)

Required Reading:

1. Grossman, in Saebø (reread section on Rashbam)

Commentaries:

1. Introduction to Exodus 21
2. Genesis 1:1
3. Genesis 1:5 (“ד”ה “ויהי ערב ויהי בקר”)
4. Genesis 22:1
5. Exodus 20:13
6. Leviticus 13:2
7. Numbers 22:1

Unit #3 (October 29; November 5): R. AVRAHAM IBN EZRA

Required Reading:

1. Uriel Simon, “Jewish Exegesis in Spain and Provence, and in the East, in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Abraham Ibn Ezra.” In Saebø, pp. 377-387.

Commentaries:

1. Introduction to the Torah (Part Five)
2. Genesis 22:1
3. Genesis 24:1-2; 25:1.
4. Genesis 25:34; 29:17; 33:4
5. Genesis 12:6 (w/צפנת פענח); 36:31
6. Deuteronomy 1:2 (beginning w/דאם תבין סוד השנים עשר)

Unit #4 (November 12, 19): R. DAVID KIMHI (RADAK)

Required Reading:

1. Mordechai Cohen, "Jewish Exegesis in Spain and Provence, and in the East, in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: The Qimhi Family." In Saebo, pp. 388-415.

Commentaries:

1. Introduction to Joshua
2. Genesis 5:29; 9:20; 14:14 (ד"ה "וירדה עד דן")
3. Genesis 24:39; 25:1

Unit #5 (December 3, 10): R. MOSHE BEN NAHMAN (RAMBAN)

Required Reading:

1. Yaakov Elman, "Jewish Exegesis in Spain and Provence, and in the East, in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Moses ben Nahman/Nahmanides (Ramban)." In Saebo, pp. 416-432.

Commentaries:

1. Introduction to Genesis
2. Genesis 12:3
3. Genesis 24:1; 32:26