



Core Curriculum Supplement

Academic Unit / Office CLASS / CCS

Catalog Year of Implementation 2019-2020

Course (Prefix / Number) RELS / 2335

Course Title Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation

Core Proposal Request

Add to Core Curriculum

Revise course already in Core Curriculum

	Current Core Categorization (New additions: select N/A for this column)	Proposed Categorization for Upcoming Core
Foundational Component Area (required)	N/A (Not currently a Core course)	Language, Philosophy Culture (40)
Component Area Option (optional)	N/A (No Component Area Option)	Writing in the Disciplines (81)
Category Listing: Single or Double?	N/A (Not currently a Core course)	List under BOTH Foundational and Area Option.

Core Proposal Rationale - Please provide a rationale for including, or continuing to include, this course in the UH Core Curriculum:

Through an exploration of Rabbinic biblical interpretation in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts, this course teaches students critical thinking and communication skills. It challenges them to show social and personal responsibility.

Core Objectives (see [THECB Core objectives](#))

Critical Thinking

Teamwork

Communication

Social Responsibility

Empirical & Quantitative Skills

Personal Responsibility

Please explain how the Core Objectives selected above will be met:

The exploration of biblical interpretation in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts requires students to think critically about the past and the present as well as about issues such as text translation and intertextuality, the nature of interpretation and role of biblical interpretation in contemporary society. It also teaches students critical thinking as they have to submit written assignments do demonstrate their understanding of primary sources, apply basic principles of problem solving, and study scholarly trends in recent scholarship. It challenges them to show social responsibility through discussions of the political context during the time of the midrashic passage's composition, and the exploration of the midrashic passage's implications for contemporary Judaism. Finally it teaches them personal responsibility through the exploration of how the Midrash uses the biblical text to foster personal responsibility, and how the embrace of personal responsibility leads to social responsibility among the leaders of the Israelite tribes.

When submitting this proposal form, please remember to attach a syllabus, learning objectives, and/or sample lesson(s).

Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation

RELS 2335 – Spring 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays 8:30 – 10:00 am

Rabbi Kenny Weiss

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Course Description

This course explores biblical interpretation (midrash) by ancient and modern Rabbis and other members of the Jewish community in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts. Topics include literary analysis of primary sources in translation, intertextuality, the nature of interpretation and the role of biblical interpretation in contemporary society.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will explore Rabbinic biblical interpretation in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts.
2. The class will consider the emergence of a distinctively Rabbinic approach to exegesis and the development of literary forms for its expression, while also investigating the place of Torah in the ideology of Rabbinic Judaism.
3. Students will focus on primary sources from Tannaitic and Amoraic Midrashic collections, and explore the role of Midrash in contemporary society. Students will demonstrate their understanding of these primary sources through along with written exposition and argument that will include the basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in writing.
4. Students will also study trends in recent scholarship, and engage in theoretical discussions regarding hermeneutics, intertextuality, and the nature of interpretation.
5. Students will develop writing skills specific to biblical interpretation through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation.

Course Requirements

Attendance & Participation (30% of final grade). Students must be ready to analyze in class the passages assigned for that day and discuss the reading. Students should consider working together to preparing text material. Passages should be prepared with an eye towards general comprehension, exegetic techniques and structural details, the major themes emphasized and the possible contextual factors that created them.

Four Text Analysis Papers, (15% per assignment, 60% of final grade). Each paper should include a simple, straightforward analysis of the midrash that addresses:

- The methodology and structure of the midrashic passage
- The major themes and thematic flow of the material
- The usage of the basic text and the balance of midrashic material.

In addition, each paper should also answer these questions:

- What is the “problem” in the biblical text that gives rise to the midrashic interpretation?
- How does the interpretation address the problem?
- How does the interpretation teach or tell us something beyond the biblical text, such as a general moral lesson, a way of behaving, or an insight into personality, character, or political context?

Students will integrate the instructor's comments and submit a revision of the first two text analysis papers in accordance with the requirements of a course designated as Writing in the Disciplines. The first drafts of Text Analysis Papers 1 and 2 will not be graded; the revisions will be graded.

1. **Due February 13 (500 words)** – Bereshit Rabbah 7:2 – **REVISION DUE FEBRUARY 27**
2. **Due February 27 (750 words)** – Eikhah Rabbah Petihta 21 **REVISION DUE MARCH 20**
3. **Due March 27 (1,000 words)** – Vayikra Rabbah 1:4
4. **Due April 10 (1,500 words)** – Sifre Devarim Piska 13
 - a. Discuss the political context during the time of the midrashic passage's composition, and explore the midrashic passage's implications for contemporary Judaism.
 - b. Explore how the midrash uses the biblical text to foster personal responsibility, and how the embrace of personal responsibility leads to social responsibility among the leaders of the Israelite tribes.

Quiz – April 17 (10% of final grade). Students will take a quiz of the terms in the “Midrash Glossary.” The quiz will ask students to briefly define six required terms, and then define three terms among an additional eight.

Written Work

All written work must be submitted to Blackboard Learn prior to the beginning of class on the day that the assignment is due. Failure to submit a writing assignment on time will result in the loss of 1/2 grade for each class period the assignment is late.

Written assignments should include textual citations that follow the guidelines in *The SBL Handbook of Style*. You will find the following sections most germane to this course: 8.1.2, 8.2, 8.3.1, 8.3.8 and 8.3.10.

Patrick H. Alexander, *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Society of Biblical Literature) 1999 ISBN 156563487X. *The SBL Handbook of Style* is available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=H8f-WfdTMFUC&>.

Accommodations

Students with Disabilities. Please let me know during the first couple weeks of class if you anticipate problems fulfilling course requirements because of the way you see, hear, read, or get around campus. I'm happy to make special arrangements in cooperation with staff at the Center for Students with Disabilities.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Required Readings and Texts

Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (Jewish Publication Society) 1985 edition ISBN 9780827603660 (pbk.). The Jewish Publication Society publishes various editions of *Tanakh* at various price points, all of which are suitable for this course, including the iPad/iPhone edition.

Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press) 2000 ISBN 0192853902 (pbk.). Students who have taken RELS 2330 Judaism are exempt from this reading.

All other primary and secondary readings are available on Blackboard Learn.

Topics, Assigned Texts and Readings

Introduction to Midrash, Dual Torah, Jewish Exegesis

January 16/18

Reading: David Stern, “Midrash” and “Aggadah” from Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, Ed. A.A. Cohen and P. Mendes-Flohr, pp. 613-620.
Solomon, pp. 1-97

January 30/Feb 1

Texts: Bereshit Rabbah 1:10 (Genesis 1:1-31)
Bereshit Rabbah 8:5 and text analysis
Bereshit Rabbah 48:18-19 (Genesis 18:1-15)
Tanhuma, Noah 5 (Genesis 6:1-22)

Handouts: Faith vs. Reason
Rabbinic Literature Chart
Jewish Text

Reading: Solomon, pp. 98-135
James Kugel, The Bible As It Was, pp. 1-36.

February 6/8

Texts: Bereshit Rabbah 7:2 (Genesis 1:20-23)
Shemot Rabbah 1:26 (Exodus 1:1-6:13)
Bereshit Rabbah 1:5 (Genesis 1:1)
Commentaries on Noah (Genesis 9:20-22, 25)

Reading: Barry Holtz, “Midrash” from Back to the Sources, Ed. Barry Holtz, pp. 177-204.
Joseph Heinemann, “The Nature of the Aggadah” in Midrash and Literature, Ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 41-55.

February 13/15

Texts: **TEXT ANALYSIS 1 DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS FEBRUARY 13**
Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Tractate Vayassa, Exodus 15:22 (Exodus 15:22-16:36)
Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Tractate Vayassa, Exodus 16:14
Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 62a
Babylonian Talmud, *Menachot* 29b

Reading: Daniel Boyarin, “Analogy Vs. Anomaly in Midrashic Hermeneutic: Tractates Wayassa and Amaleq in the Mekilta,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 106 (1986), 659-667.

The Petihta (Proem)

February 20/22

Texts: Bereshit Rabbah 24:3 (Genesis 5:1-5)
Eikhah Rabbah 1:1C (Lamentations 1:1-6)
Eikhah Rabbah Petihta 21
Pesikta de-Rab Kahana Piska 1:2 and text analysis

Reading: Marc Bregman, “Isaak Heinemann’s Classic Study of Aggadah and Midrash.”
Joseph Heinemann, “The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study,” in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22, Ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, pp. 100-122.

February 27/Mar 1

TEXT ANALYSIS 2 AND TEXT ANALYSIS 1 REVISION BOTH DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS FEBRUARY 27

- Texts: Vayikra Rabbah 1:1 (found in Stern, pp. 108-109) (Leviticus 1:1-9)
 Vayikra Rabbah 31:4 (Leviticus 24:1-9)
- Reading: Joseph Heinemann, "Profile of a Midrash: The Art of Composition in Leviticus Rabba" in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39 (1971), pp. 141-150.
 David Stern, "Midrash and the Language of Exegesis: A Study of Vayikra Rabbah, Chapter 1" in Midrash and Literature, Ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 105-124.

March 6/8

NO CLASS MARCH 6

- Texts: Vayikra Rabbah 1:4 (Leviticus 1:1)
 Vayikra Rabbah 1:5 (Leviticus 1:1)
 Pesikta De-Rab Kahana, Piska 15:3
 Eikhah Rabbah 4:11 and parallels (found in Stern, pp. 24-29)
- Reading: Jacob Elbaum, "Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and his Attitude to the Aggadah," in Scripta Hierosolymitana 22, Ed. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, pp. 28-47.
 David Stern, "Composition and Exegesis," in Parables in Midrash, pp. 4-45.

MARCH 13/15

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 20/22

TEXT ANALYSIS 2 REVISION DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS MARCH 20

- Texts: Bereshit Rabbah 10:9 (Genesis 2:1-4)
 Avot de Rabbi Natan Nusach A 14
 Avot de Rabbi Natan Nusach B 12
- Reading: "Hermeneutical Rules" from Encyclopaedia Judaica
 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Who's Kidding Whom?: A Serious reading of Rabbinic Word Plays" in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55:4, pp. 765-788.

March 27/29

TEXT ANALYSIS 3 DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS MARCH 27

- Texts: Selections from Esther Rabbah
 Sifre Devarim, Piska 13 (Deuteronomy 1:1-18)
 Vayikra Rabbah 33:1
- Reading: Burton Visotzky, "Most Tender and Fairest of Women: A Study in the Transmission of Aggadah" in Harvard Theological Review 76:4 (1983), pp. 403-418.

The Mashal (Parable)

April 3/5

- Texts: To Be Determined
- Reading: Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic" in Critical Inquiry 16 (Spring 1990), pp. 532-550.

Intertextuality

April 10/12

TEXT ANALYSIS 4 DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS APRIL 10

- Texts: Midrash Mishle 12
 Eliyahu Zuta 3
- Readings: Daniel Boyarin, "Old Wine in New Bottles: Intertextuality and Midrash" in Poetics Today, 8:3-4 (1987), pp. 539-556.

April 17/19

Texts:

QUIZ APRIL 17

Pesikta de Rab Kahana, Piska 20:6

Shemot Rabbah 46:1

Jerusalem Talmud *Yebamot* 12:6 (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)Examples from Ma'aseh Book

Selection of matters set forth by number

Reading:

Jeffrey Rubenstein, "From Mythic Motifs to Sustained Myth: The Revision of Rabbinic Traditions in Medieval Midrashim," in Harvard Theological Review 89:2 (1996), pp. 131-159.**Modern Midrash****April 24/26**

Texts:

Bill Cosby – "Noah"

Marc Gellman, "Finding the Right Man" in Does God Have a Big Toe, pp. 47-51.Marc Gellman, "Watching the Burning Bush Burn" in Does God Have a Big Toe, pp. 69-71.Marc Bregman, "Serach: The Recovery of Joseph's Bones" in Living Texts: The Journal of Contemporary Midrash 4 (1998), 12-17.Readings from "And God Remembered" by Susan Sasso (distributed in class)
Genesis 12:1-22:19Mark Kaiserman, "Why God Doesn't Try to Talk to Us Directly Anymore" in CCAR Journal (Spring 2000), pp. 37-44.Stewart Shilcrat, "The mysteries of beit bal" in *Sh'ma* 21/408 (February 22, 1991), p.61Jonathan Kirsch, "The Rape of Dinah" in The Harlot by the Side of the Road, Ballantine, 1997, pp. 62-75.