

## **Lecture 1: Reading the Bible.**

*Reading:* Kugel xi-xiv and 1-46; Canons of the Hebrew Bible (following these notes).

The Hebrew Bible is an **anthology of books**, written in Hebrew (mostly) by the people of Judah and Israel between (approximately) the eighth century BCE and (approximately) the second century BCE.

Four main **types** of books:

- history (narrative) (+ law);
- prophecy;
- wisdom (advice on how to live a good life; or books reflecting on the ways of the world);
- hymns (the book of Psalms).

The quadripartite arrangement of Christian Bibles (Law; History; Poetry/Hymns; Prophecy) reflects this.

Biblical books derive from **different groups/classes**:

- Priests (teach Torah); institutional home of priests was temple; cult of sacrifices;
- Prophets (speak the word of the Lord); not institutional; warning figures and social critics;
- Scribes (or sages) (give sage advice to upper class).

The tripartite arrangement (Torah; Prophets; Writings) of Jewish Bibles reflects this.

Modern Bible scholarship/scholars (MBS) assumes that:

- The Bible is a collection of books like any others: created and put together by normal (i.e. fallible) human beings;
- The Bible is often inconsistent because it derives from sources (written and oral) that do not always agree; individual biblical books grow over time, are multi-layered;
- The Bible is to be interpreted in its context:
  - ♦ Individual biblical books take shape in historical contexts; the Bible is a document of its time;
  - ♦ Biblical verses are to be interpreted in context;
  - ♦ The “original” or contextual meaning is to be prized above all others;
- The Bible is an ideologically-driven text (collection of texts). It is not “objective” or neutral about any of the topics that it treats. Its historical books are not “historical” in our sense.
  - ♦ “hermeneutics of suspicion”;

- ♦ Consequently MBS often reject the alleged “facts” of the Bible (e.g. was Abraham a real person? Did the Israelites leave Egypt in a mighty Exodus? Was Solomon the king of a mighty empire?);
- ♦ MBS do not assess its moral or theological truth claims, and if they do, they do so from a humanist perspective;
  - ★ The Bible contains many ideas/laws that we moderns find offensive;
- The authority of the Bible is for MBS a historical artifact; it does not derive from any ontological status as the revealed word of God;

Ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters, and their medieval and modern continuators, have an opposite set of assumptions according to which the Bible is:

- True (in two senses: factually, morally);
- Qualitatively different from all “regular” books:
  - ♦ Revealed by God;
  - ♦ Written by people who were in touch with God;
  - ♦ Divine speech is omnisignificant, cryptic, many meanings, layers of meaning;
  - ♦ Demands interpretation (exegesis);
- Harmonious, perfect;
  - ♦ Inconsistencies are only apparent;
- eternally true, speaking to and about *us*;
  - ♦ Not bound by any historical context, not historically conditioned;
  - ♦ Hence Jews could find Judaism in the text, and Christians could find Christianity, although historically considered the text is neither Jewish nor Christian;
- Kugel has a slightly different version of these “Four Assumptions “ (pp. 14-17);
- In reaction to MBS, the theory of evolution, archaeological discoveries, etc. some Jews and Christians began to insist on these assumptions all the more so:
  - ♦ E.g. Evangelical Protestant doctrines of “inerrancy”;
    - ★ See e.g. [the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#) (1978);
  - ♦ On-going struggles within Judaism and Christianity between modernist and anti-modernist wings;
    - ★ See the troubles of Charles Augustus Briggs discussed by Kugel;
    - ★ Kugel’s own twists and turns;

Perhaps the most obvious and blatant conflict between MBS and traditional belief concerns the date and the authorship of the biblical books:

- Traditionally the Biblical books are seen as unitary compositions from single authors, none of them later than the Persian period (ca. 450 BCE);

- MBS: most of the books have a long period of gestation and derive from many sources; the latest books derive from long after c. 450 BCE, even as late as the mid-second century BCE;
- The great battleground is the Torah (the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses): is the Torah the earliest biblical book, revealed by God to Moses shortly after the Exodus, around 1300-1200 BCE, or one of the latest, not completed until the exilic period – or later? (see Kugel)

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<p>TORAH 1) Genesis 2) Exodus 3) Leviticus 4) Numbers 5) Deuteronomy</p> <p>NEVIIM: THE PROPHETS 6) Joshua 7) Judges 8) 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel 9) 1 Kings and 2 Kings 10) Isaiah 11) Jeremiah 12) Ezekiel 13) The Twelve: Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi</p>	<p>THE LAW Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p>HISTORIES Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles <i>[Prayer of Manasseh]</i> <i>1 Esdras</i> Ezra Nehemiah <i>Tobit</i> <i>Judith</i> Esther (with <i>insertions</i>) <i>1 Maccabees</i> <i>2 Maccabees</i> <i>[3 Maccabees]</i> <i>[4 Maccabees]</i></p>	<p>THE LAW Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p>HISTORIES Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles <i>Prayer of Manasseh</i> <i>1 Esdras</i> <i>2 Esdras</i> Ezra Nehemiah <i>Tobit</i> <i>Judith</i> Esther (with <i>insertions</i>) <i>1 Maccabees</i> <i>2 Maccabees</i></p>	<p>THE LAW 1) Genesis 2) Exodus 3) Leviticus 4) Numbers 5) Deuteronomy</p> <p>HISTORIES 6) Joshua 7) Judges 8) Ruth 9) 1 Samuel 10) 2 Samuel 11) 1 Kings 12) 2 Kings 13) 1 Chronicles 14) 2 Chronicles 15) Ezra 16) Nehemiah 17) Esther</p>

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<p>KETUVIM: THE WRITINGS 14) Psalms 15) Proverbs 16) Job 17) Song of Songs 18) Ruth 19) Lamentations 20) Ecclesiastes 21) Esther 22) Daniel 23) Ezra and Nehemiah 24) 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles</p>	<p>WISDOM/ POETRY Job Psalms <i>[Psalm no. 151]</i> <i>[Odes]</i> Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs <i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> <i>Ecclesiasticus</i> <i>[Psalms of Solomon]</i></p> <p>PROPHECY Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations <i>Baruch</i> <i>Epistle of Jeremiah</i> Ezekiel Daniel (with <i>insertions</i>) Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi</p>	<p>WISDOM/ POETRY Job Psalms</p> <p>Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs <i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> <i>Ecclesiasticus</i></p> <p>PROPHECY Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations <i>Baruch</i> <i>Epistle of Jeremiah</i> Ezekiel Daniel (with <i>insertions</i>) Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi</p>	<p>WISDOM/ POETRY 18) Job 19) Psalms 20) Proverbs 21) Ecclesiastes 22) Song of Songs</p> <p>PROPHECY 23) Isaiah 24) Jeremiah 25) Lamentations 26) Ezekiel 27) Daniel 28) Hosea 29) Joel 30) Amos 31) Obadiah 32) Jonah 33) Micah 34) Nahum 35) Habakkuk 36) Zephaniah 37) Haggai 38) Zechariah 39) Malachi</p> <p>APOCRYPHA <i>1 Esdras</i> <i>2 Esdras</i> <i>Tobit</i> <i>Judith</i> <i>Additions to Esther</i> <i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> <i>Ecclesiasticus</i> <i>Baruch</i> <i>Epistle of Jeremiah</i> <i>Song of the Three Children</i> <i>Story of Susanna</i> <i>Bel and the Dragon</i> <i>Prayer of Manasseh</i> <i>1 Maccabees</i> <i>2 Maccabees</i></p>