

Lecture 23: The Hebrew Bible in Judaism.

Reading:

JSB 1863-1875 ("Midrash and Midrashic Interpretation" by David Stern);

JSB 1929-1937 (The Bible in the Synagogue" by Avigdor Shinan).

Daniel provides evidence for Judaism in the second century BCE.

Development from Israelite religion → Judaism:

- a process, not an event
- some key moments in the transition:
 - ✦ 587 BCE Babylonian exile
 - ✦ Restoration under the Persians (516 BCE temple rebuilt)
 - ✦ Emergence of the Torah book (5th century BCE)
 - ✦ Septuagint, Torah translated into Greek in Egypt (3rd century BCE)
 - ✦ Synagogues appear in Egypt (3rd century BCE)
 - ✦ Hasmonean revolt against the Greek kings of Syria (Seleucids) 167-164 BCE
 - ✦ Arrival of the Romans 63 BCE
 - ✦ Activity of Jesus c. 30s CE
 - ✦ Destruction of the second temple in 70 CE
 - ✦ Second century CE: emergence of Rabbinic Judaism
 - ✦ Ca. 200 CE: the appearance of the Mishnah

Continuity and discontinuity:

Israelite society and religion: king, prophet, temple, sacrifices, land;

Jewish society and religion:

- priests and sages instead of a king;
 - ✦ after 70 CE priests become marginal;
 - ✦ after 70 CE emergence of sages (also known as rabbis);
- scripture and scriptural interpretation instead of adding or modifying the text
 - ✦ abundance of non-canonical literature last centuries BCE;
 - ★ apocalypses, pseudepigraphy, apocryphal books;
 - ★ biblical interpretation: translations, commentaries, paraphrases;
 - ★ but no more literary prophecy;
 - ✦ emergence of the Torah book;
 - ✦ growth of midrash, legal interpretation and non-legal interpretation (Stern);
 - ✦ importance of the Torah;
 - ✦ post-70: doctrine of the Oral Torah.
- synagogues and portable piety in addition to, and then instead of, the temple
 - ✦ prayer and scriptural study, and entire regimen of observing the Torah instead of sacrifices.
 - ✦ Scriptural study and reading in synagogue (Shinan):
 - ★ Lections, lectionary cycle, Targum.
 - ★ Use of Greek and Aramaic alongside Hebrew.

- ♦ Use of Bible, esp. Psalms, in prayers (if you're interested, essay in JSB).
- diaspora and political quietism instead of land and independence.
 - ♦ Emergence of communal identity markers: refusal to worship other gods, forbidden foods (including "food sacrificed to idols"), circumcision, Sabbath, conversion to Judaism, prohibition of intermarriage.
- Reward and punishment in the hereafter instead of this world: after death, end of days, resurrection, messiah.
 - ♦ Philosophically minded people like Philo believed in immortality of the soul rather than resurrection of the body.
 - ♦ Not all Jewish texts have a messiah in their end of days scenario e.g. Daniel does not.
- Instead of the cosmic monism of the Bible, some apocalypticists have a cosmic dualism; rabbinic piety reasserts monism.
 - ♦ Cosmic dualists posit the existence of some force (e.g. the Devil) antagonistic to YHWH which currently and temporarily controls the world but which will ultimately be overthrown.
 - ♦ Cosmic dualism more characteristic of Christianity than Judaism in post 70 period.

In spite of these discontinuities, elision of distance between the readers and the text: Jews, Israelites, Hebrews

Some notes on rabbinic Judaism:

- Rabbinic texts, esp. Mishnah and its derivatives, is scholastic
- Rabbis engage in very selective reading of the Hebrew Bible
- "Literal" reading of many biblical laws, even if very unliteral in interpretation of details (see Stern; classic example: prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother's milk)
 - ♦ Allegory (seeing biblical laws as representing moral qualities, undoing the literal meaning completely) more characteristic of Christianity than Judaism
- The Bible esp. the Torah is the source of ultimate authority, but intermediated through tradition, exegesis, midrash, supplemented by Mishnah. Similarly, the American constitution.