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 rabbinc 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.