

BIB 525 - Miqra'ot Gedolot

Fall 2018/5779
Mon. & Wed., 1:15-2:30 p.m.

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Course Website: <https://ajubib525.ajs.hcommons.org/>

Course Goals

1. To attain a familiarity with and deep understanding of the concerns, methodologies, and interpretations of (1) individual commentators, (2) schools of commentary, and (3) intertextual conversations;
2. To gain facility with the classical texts of Torah commentary, developing an individualized process for working through *parshanut*;
3. To contextualize the commentators historically and culturally and appreciate the textual and material problems presented by the study of premodern texts;
4. To culminate with the ability to contribute knowledgeably and creatively to traditional materials.

Course Overview & Material to be Covered

This course will cover the classical medieval commentaries on the *Humash* printed in most editions of *Miqra'ot Gedolot*: Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban. We will engage with this rich textual tradition through close reading of commentarial text, predicated on a solid understanding of the biblical passage, at each class meeting. The texts that we study will take us from early Ashkenaz to “golden age” Sefarad and all the way to mystical *sod*—but also on a narrative progression through the complex *parashot* of Bamidbar, the story of the “Wilderness Generation” as they approach the Land of Israel and prepare to enter. Our study will culminate with a sustained unit on the strange story of Bila'm as interpreted by the great commentators

We will approach *Miqra'ot Gedolot* not as a disembodied text but as one made up of distinct voices influenced by each commentator's time, place, and, sometimes, by one another. In order to understand the contexts of the various commentaries, we will examine them first individually, then in conversation with their peers. Throughout the course, we will probe the pathways by which the medieval Torah commentaries have been transmitted to us, asking questions about why and how they were written and used by their authors and first audiences, and what impact they have had on Jewish tradition. Students will have the opportunity to present their own commentary in the final project, writing their own line commentary on a set of *parshiyyot*, in dialogue with classical *mefarshim*.

Texts & Materials

We will be working from the following texts:

- Mordechai Breuer, ed., *Torat Hayyim*, 7 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987).
- Tanakh, Koren ed. (Hebrew only)
- Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*
- Source sheets (these will be available in the course Dropbox and website)
- Selected scholarly articles (available via Dropbox)

For the texts of the *mefarshim*, you are required to work from *Torat Hayyim*, though you need not own it. It is available in the library and *beit midrash*, and, if you wish, can be purchased as a set on Amazon and online Judaica

retailers. For class, you need only bring copies of the pages we are working on (digital copies are fine, as long as you can easily access and read them).

You should use Jastrow as your primary dictionary for the (medieval) mefarshim—yes, even though it doesn't say so in the very long title! You will probably want to consult Brown-Driver-Briggs or another reliable Biblical Hebrew dictionary for questions you may have about the Torah text, as well as a dictionary of rashei tevot.

There are many online resources that I do—and don't—recommend. The former are on the course website.

For your reference, here are the articles we'll be reading and their full bibliographic information.

Article list

Dijkstra, Meindert. "Is Balaam Also among the Prophets?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 43–64.

Sarna, Nahum M. "Abraham Ibn Ezra as Exegete," in Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris, ed., *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-27.

Septimus, Bernard. "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-34.

Simon, Uriel. "Abraham Ibn Ezra." In *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume I: From the Beginning to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 2: The Middle Ages*, edited by Magne Sæbø, Chris Brekelmans, and Menahem Haran, 377–87. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000.

Viezel, Eran. "'The Anxiety of Influence': Rashbam's Approach to Rashi's Commentary on the Torah." *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 40 (2016): 279–303.

Viezel, Eran. "The Secret of the Popularity of Rashi's Commentary on Torah." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 17 (2014), 207-217.

Wolfson, Elliot R. "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic." *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 14 (1989): 103–78 [Part II: pp. 129-153].

Course Expectations

You are, first and foremost, expected to be an active participant in your own learning and in the formation of a respectful, engaged discussion space in the classroom. This means that you should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials, as follows:

- You should be comfortable reading and translating the Miqra', and able to explain it, i.e., what is the context, what is happening in the text?;
- You should be able to identify potential issues in the Miqra' and suggest what the commentator(s) will address;
- You should be able to capably read and translate the commentary;
- You will have looked up any references you identify within the texts, such as other *pesuqim* cited in the text.

- You should have an idea to propose about the content of the commentary, e.g., what is Ibn Ezra getting at here?

Please note: This does *not* mean that you should be able to do all of the above flawlessly and without having any questions or doubts. Preparation means doing a careful, close reading of the material, a skill we will practice together and actively develop a process for in class. It means you will know, for the most part, what you're unsure about on class day. Maybe you couldn't find the midrash referenced (maybe you didn't realize it was referenced), maybe you are unsure of the *niqqud* of that unfamiliar word, maybe you are stumped by an entire comment--not only is that okay, all of that is the reason we are working on this material! The idea is to have spent focused time with the text, so that you can bring these questions to class and get closer to the ideal presented in the bullet points above.

Assignments & Assessment

Following is an overview of the assignments that students will receive as a way to practice skills, demonstrate mastery of the material--and, importantly, try out and contribute their own ideas. Due dates are listed on the course schedule, and assignment sheets with greater detail will be distributed well in advance of due dates, but for your reference, here is a brief description:

1. Attendance, class preparation, and active participation (50%)

Please refer to the bullet points in the "Course Expectations" section directly above for a detailed description of what class preparation means for our course. Active participation means ably reading, translating, and explaining the texts when called to do so; being prepared to knowledgeably add to others' remarks; and being engaged in class discussions. Of course, for this you'll need to be in attendance.

2. Assignments (10%)

Students will be given periodic assignments, including contributing regularly to a group-edited individual response to the parashot studied.

3. Final Project (40%, divided as follows)

For their final project, students will select a set of *parshiyyot* to work on, in consultation with the instructor, and write their own line commentary on it, with reference to the classical *mefarshim* (5-7 pp.).

- Part 1: Prospectus (10%)
- Part 2: Presentation (10%)
- Part 3: Written line commentary (20%)

Please refer to the percentages as a reflection of the relative weight given to each area. This means that the effort that you put into weekly preparation and in-class discussion is really important, with room for exploration, mistakes, and learning.

Policies & Attendance Requirements

- **Attendance:** Missing more than three class meetings will result in a lowered grade, illness and emergencies excepted. If you will be absent from class, let me know as soon as possible.
- **Assignment Submission:** Assignments should be submitted in a digital format that allows for me to comment on them (Google Doc, emailed Word doc, PDF, etc.) and are due by the end of the day noted (11:59 p.m.).
- **Late Assignments & Alternate Test Dates:** Late assignments will be accepted only if arrangements are made beforehand, emergencies and accommodations excepted. If you require more time for an assignment or test date, the more time we have to work out an equitable solution, the more flexibility you can receive.

- **Office Hours:** By appointment, and I will generally be in the classroom before each meeting should you wish to drop in or go over any questions before class (but it's always a good idea to confirm).
- **Email:** I'm available to answer any questions or concerns you may have via email and am usually able to respond quickly.

Honor Code

The Vice President for Academic Affairs has asked all instructors to remind students as part of the syllabus that the University's Honor Code applies to all courses, including this one. As part of that reminder, he has asked us to include the Honor Code's section on plagiarism, which you can find on the AJU website. Be sure to attribute ideas and passages correctly so that you do not appear to be claiming them as your own and thus stealing them. Learn from others, but give credit where credit is due.

BIB525 Course Schedule – Fall 2018

Wk	Date	Topic	Text	Assignment
	I. Introduction			
1	Aug. 27 (M)	Introduction: How We Got Miqraot Gedolot		Write an outline of Sefer Bamidbar
	Aug. 29 (W)	Bamidbar Beqiyut	Bring a Tanakh Map (Handout)	Revise outline; Read through source sheets
2	<i>Labor Day - no class - Sept. 3 (M)</i>			
	Sept. 5 (W)	What is Parshanut ha-Miqra?	Targum Onqelos Sa'adyah's Tafsir Tanḥuma Menaḥem b. Saruq, <i>Maḥberet</i> (Source sheets)	Prepare methodologies source sheet; Mefarshim <i>EJ</i> assignment
3	<i>Rosh ha-Shanah - no class</i>			
	Sept. 12 (W)	Who were the Mefarshim?	Methodological Introductions (Source Sheet)	Prepare texts; Read Harris article
4	Sept. 17 (M)	Text Reading Workshop	Bamidbar: The Designation of the Levites <u>Texts:</u> Rashi on Num. 1: 1, 53; 3: 12 <u>Reading:</u> R. Harris, "Jewish Biblical Exegesis from Its Beginning to the Twelfth Century"	Prepare texts; Read Viesel article
	<i>Yom Kippur - no class - Sept. 19 (W)</i>			
5	<i>Sukkot - no class – Sept. 24 (M)</i>			

II. Medieval Ashkenaz—From Derash to Peshat				
	Sept. 26 (W)	Rashi	Naso: The Sotah Ritual <u>Texts</u> : Rashi on Num. 5: 12, 21 <u>Reading</u> : E. Viesel, “The Secret of the Popularity of Rashi’s Commentary on Torah”	Prepare texts; Parashah response
6	<i>Shemini Atzeret – no class – Oct. 1 (M)</i>			
	Oct. 3 (W)	Rashi	Beha’alotekha: Miriam’s Affliction <u>Texts</u> : Rashi on Num. 12:1	Prepare texts
7	Oct. 8 (M)	Rashi	Beha’alotekha: Miriam’s Affliction <u>Texts</u> : Rashi on Num. 12: 4, 10, 12, 14	Prepare texts
	Oct. 12 (W)	Rashbam	Beha’alotekha: Miriam’s Affliction <u>Texts</u> : Rashbam on Num. 12: 1, 4, 12 <u>Reading</u> : E. Viesel, “The Anxiety of Influence”	Prepare texts; Parashah response
8	Oct. 15 (M)	Rashbam	Shelah: The Meraglim <u>Texts</u> : Rashbam on Num. 13: 2	Prepare texts
	Oct. 17 (W)	Rashbam	Shelah: The Wilderness Generation <u>Texts</u> : Rashbam on Num. 14: 6, 22, 33	Prepare texts; Read Simon article
III. Medieval Sefarad—From Philology to Pardes				
9	Oct. 22 (M)	Ibn Ezra	Shelah: The Meraglim & Wilderness Generation <u>Texts</u> : Ibn Ezra on Num. 13: 2, 17, 25 ;14: 6 <u>Reading</u> : U. Simon, “Abraham Ibn Ezra”	Prepare texts; Parashah response
	Oct. 24 (W)	Ibn Ezra	Qorah: The Rebellion Against Moshe <u>Texts</u> : Ibn Ezra on Num. 16: 1	Prepare texts; Read Sarna article
10	Oct. 29 (M)	Ibn Ezra	Qorah: The Rebellion Against Moshe <u>Texts</u> : Ibn Ezra on Num. 16: 30, 35 <u>Reading</u> : N. Sarna, “Abraham Ibn Ezra as Exegete”	Prepare texts; Parashah response
	Oct. 31 (W)	Ibn Ezra	Huqqat: Water From the Rock (II) <u>Texts</u> : Ibn Ezra on Num. 20: 8	Prepare texts; Work on prospectus
11	Nov. 5 (M)	Ramban	Huqqat: Water From the Rock (II) <u>Texts</u> : Ramban on Num. 20:8 (selections) **Prospectus assignment due**	Prepare texts; Read Septimus article
	Nov. 7 (W)	Ramban	Huqqat: Death of Aharon <u>Texts</u> : Ramban on Num. 20: 26	Prepare texts; Read Wolfson article

			<u>Reading</u> : B. Septimus, “Open Rebuke and Concealed Love”	
12	Nov. 12 (M)	Ramban	Huqqat: Sihon & Og <u>Texts</u> : Ramban on Num. 21: 21, 29 (selection) <u>Reading</u> : E. Wolfson, “By Way of Truth” (Read Part II: pp. 129-153)	Read through source sheet; Parashah response
	IV. Miqraot Gedolot—Bringing the Mefarshim Together			
	Nov. 14 (W)	All	Balaq: Bila’m & the Donkey (Intro) Inter-Biblical & Rabbinic Sources (Source sheet)	Prepare texts; Read Dijkstra article
13	Nov. 19 (M)	All	Balaq: Bila’m & the Donkey <u>Texts</u> : Num. 22: 5, 8-11 (as they occur) <u>Reading</u> : M. Dijkstra, “Is Balaam Also among the Prophets?”	Prepare texts
	Nov. 21 (W)	All	Balaq: Bila’m & the Donkey <u>Texts</u> : Num. 22: 20, 23, 25, 28	Prepare texts
14	Nov. 26 (M)	All	Balaq: Bila’m & the Donkey <u>Texts</u> : 23: 1, 9-10, 21	Prepare texts
	Nov. 28 (W)	All	Balaq: Bila’m & the Donkey <u>Texts</u> : Num. 24: 1, 5	Prepare texts; Parashah response
15	Dec. 3 (M)	All	Pinhas: The Pe’or Incident <u>Texts</u> : Num. 25:1-3, 31: 16, 17	Prepare texts, Parashah response
	Dec. 5 (W)	All	Masa’ei: Preparing to Enter the Land <u>Texts</u> : Num. 33:50-56	Read over source sheet; Parashah response
	V. Conclusion: What’s Next? Supercommentary, Early Modern Approaches, Modernity			
16	Dec. 10 (M)	Selected commentators on Bamidbar	Early Modern & Modern Commentators (source sheet) Supercommentaries (source sheet)	Work on final project
	Dec. 12 (W)	**Student Oral Final Presentations**		Work on final project
	<i>Finals Week – Dec. 17-21 – **Final project due Dec. 19 (W)**</i>			