

HUMA1850 Bible and Modern Contexts

Sept 16: What are the best tools and methods for studying the Bible academically or “How do I get an A in this course?” (Tony B)

Read for today: IB ch. 1: Studying the Bible in its Ancient Context(s) (pp. 16-32); and Genesis 6-8 (NOAB pp. 18-21).

Tutorial Assignment: One of the fundamental conclusions of biblical scholarship is that the Bible, particularly the Pentateuch (the first five books), are a collection of materials written by multiple authors. In light of this conclusion, read the story of Noah in Genesis 6-8 and answer the following question: Scholars see two accounts of the flood of Noah woven together in Genesis 6-8 — can you? You need to read the text very carefully. Try to isolate the elements of the two different accounts and describe what the main differences are (hints: how many animals go into the ark? how long did the rains last?).

Also, we would like to know more about your own previous interactions with the Bible. Please answer the following:

1. Write a half-page to one-page statement or mini-autobiography of your past encounters with the Bible.
2. Which parts of it have been most central in such encounters?
3. Have you studied the Bible in an academic context before? Have you had unusually positive or negative experiences with the Bible or people citing it?

1. Major Periods in the Biblical Drama

1250-1000 BCE: Pre-state tribal period; Texts: scattered oral tales eventually written down

1000-930 BCE: United Monarchy

930-722 BCE: Divided monarchy

722-586 BCE: “Judah alone”

586-538 BCE: Babylonian Exile

538-332 BCE: Persian period

332-167 BCE: Hellenistic period

167-63 BCE: Hasmonean Independence

63 BCE: beginning of Roman period

70 CE: Fall of the second temple; Texts: New Testament between 50 and 125 CE

135 CE: Jerusalem destroyed

2. The Pre-History of Ancient Israel (a prelude to “Major Periods in the Biblical Drama”)

- the Fertile Crescent: surrounded by the Arabian desert to the east, Mediterranean Sea to the west, desert of Sinai peninsula to the south, the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates to the north (Mesopotamia=“in the midst of, or between, rivers”)
- in the middle is Canaan, aka Pheonicia, Israel, Palestine
- Palestine populated in three major migrations
 - I. From the Arabian Peninsula (ca. 3500 BCE)
 - agricultural peoples who set up strong independent city-states or small kingdoms in the lush plains and lowlands

- Canaan/Phoenicia (=land of purple); name comes from principle trade item (purple-died cloth)
- II. From Mesopotamia (ca. 1750 BCE)
 - the Sumerians and the Akkadians (flourish 3000-2000 BCE)
 - Sumerians overrun 2000-1800 BCE by the Amorites from the Arabian peninsula
 - name from “Westerner” in Akkadian; established Mari and Babylonia; infiltrated Canaan ca. mid 18th c.
 - other peoples in Canaan: Hurrians from Armenia, Hittites from present-day Turkey
 - ‘Apiru or Habiru (“wanderers” or “outsiders”); semi-nomadic peoples on fringes of civilizations; sometimes formed guerrilla bands attacking caravans or raiding villages; hired selves out as mercenary soldiers or were forced into slave labour on public projects
 - Abraham the Hebrew (Gen 14:13)
- III. From Egypt (ca. 1300 BCE)
 - some move into Egypt (1720-1570 BCE); Egyptians call them Hyksos (“rulers of foreign countries”)
 - a “mixed crowd” of indentured workers (Ex. 12:37) (perhaps the descendants of the Hyksos) decided to leave settled life in Egypt and move into Palestine

3. Religions of Bronze Age Palestine (3000-1300 BCE)

- fertility gods of the plains: El (“God”; Father Sky), Asherah (Mother Earth), Baal (“Lord”; the storm god), Ashtart/Baalath, Anat (goddess of love and war)
- “sympathetic magic” and temple prostitution
- gods of the hill country: relate not to farming, but to pastoralism
- standing stones: date from as early as 10,000 BCE; 142 sites in Palestine
 - referred to in the Bible as *massebah* (plural: *masseboth*)
- four theories:
 - as a memorial to someone who has died
 - as a witness to a treaty or a vow
 - to commemorate a special event
 - as a cultic object representing either a deity or its essence

4. How to Read the Bible (well, in this course anyway)

- focus on Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History
- interplay of orality and literacy: oral period 18th century to 10th century BCE; composition of texts begins ca. 1000 BCE; finishes ca. 500 BCE
- excursus: three patriarchs and three covenants
 - Noah: a “prehistoric” character; saved humanity and animals from flood; Noachic covenant: no more floods, but don’t eat blood
 - Abraham: 18th century BCE; a “Hebrew” (nomad) in the hill countries of Canaan; Abrahamic covenant: land and children in return for worship (and circumcision)

- Moses: 14th-13th century; led group of “Hebrews” out of Egypt to Canaan; Mosaic covenant: if Israel follows God’s law, he will bless them; if not, he will punish them
- changing attitudes toward practices: *masseboth* (acceptable? see Gen 28:18; Exodus 24:4 etc.; or “detestable”? see Deut 16:22)
- foreshadowing of later events: the Babylonian Exile in Lev 26:27-45
- theme of disobedience, punishment, mercy

5. Tutorial Discussion

6. Multiple Contexts, Multiple Methods

- Historical criticism: analyzes how and where the biblical texts (and oral traditions in them) were composed
- Tradition criticism: attempt to identify early oral traditions standing behind the biblical text
- Form criticism: seeks to classify units of scripture into literary patterns (such as love poems, parables, sayings, elegies, legends) and that attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission
- Source criticism: the attempt to establish the sources used by the author and/or redactor of the final text
- Redaction criticism: the study of the final form of the biblical text through the combination of such sources and literary expansions of them
- Literary criticism: draws on methods in study of modern literature to study the plot, characterization, pacing, and shape of biblical texts
- Cultural criticism: use of the biblical texts in popular culture
- Feminist criticism: analyzes how the Bible presents women and how that presentation has been interpreted, or misinterpreted, by men