

Fall 2015
Wednesday 1:30-3:30, Location TBA

**Angels, Demons, and Forbidden Love:
Genesis 6 and Its Interpretation throughout History**

Prof. Sara Ronis
Office hours by appointment

The account in Genesis 6:1-4 of the “sons of God” having sex with the “daughters of man” is one that has prompted over two thousand years of questions. Does God have biological children? Why does God destroy the world in a flood? Can angels and humans procreate? Does sex require consent? The many interpretations of this story, which we will refer to as *Midrash*, touch on the nature of God, evil, free will, consent, and what it means to be human.

In this advanced undergraduate seminar, we will examine the way in which the authors of inner-biblical texts, extra-canonical texts, Dead Sea Scrolls, Hellenistic Jewish writings, rabbinic literature, medieval commentators, early modern sermons, modern folktales, and modern scholarship understand this particular story. We will pay particular attention to the specific elements within the biblical text that have been adopted and adapted by these interpreters, and to the contemporaneous concerns that motivate these readers. The greater part of each session will be given over to close and detailed analysis of the primary sources assigned in an effort to understand how the interpretations in each source constitute readings of the biblical narrative.

Over the course of the semester, you will develop skills in the critical and careful reading of both primary and secondary sources. You will understand, and complicate, the project of biblical interpretation. You will explore the implications of biblical interpretation, and its continued relevance. You will also become familiar with the history of Jewish biblical interpretation, some of its primary texts, and biblical interpreters’ particular methods of, and motivations in, interpretation.

Expectations

1. Some knowledge of either biblical or modern Hebrew is required, as many of the interpretations we will encounter center on semantic, syntactic, orthographic, and phonetic details in the original. Students are also welcome to consult translations of all texts assigned. Students unsure as to their Hebrew competence should consult Prof. Ronis.
2. LAPTOP POLICY TBD.

All of the primary sources will be gathered in a pdf, which you must bring with you to class in either paper or electronic form. All of the secondary readings for this course can be found online on our course management system.

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Requirements

This course has three main requirements. The first is participation. The second is contribution to the course blog. The third is a final paper.

1. In-class participation (**20% of the final grade**). Regular and punctual attendance and active participation in discussion, based on preparation of the assigned materials, is critical to fully engaging in this course.

Only within an atmosphere of intellectual safety will reticent people feel comfortable speaking and will anyone venture to speak in his or her own voice. In order to ensure that our meetings are conducive to open, respectful, and safe dialogue, I ask that you observe the following guidelines:

- Learn the names of your classmates so that you can meaningfully engage them as individuals.
 - Give equal priority to listening and engaging others as to voicing your own views.
 - Anticipate that the views of your classmates are more religiously and philosophically diverse than you initially expect.
 - Interpret the views of others as charitably as possible.
 - Extend to others the common courtesies of polite conversation—especially by refraining from interrupting a speaker.
2. The blog (**30% of the final grade**)
 - a. Each student must write and post 5 blog posts over the course of the semester. Each blog post should both summarize that week's primary and/or secondary reading, and then respond to it. Each student may choose which weeks to post.
 - b. Each student must respond to at least one blog post each week, posting a comment in the comment section.
 - c. Our blog can be found at www.blog.com.
 - d. Blog posts must be posted by **Sunday at 10pm**.
 - e. Blog comments must be posted by **Monday at 5:00pm**.
 3. The final paper (**50% of the final grade**): Each student must write a term paper on a relevant topic of his or her choice. The paper must engage deeply with the *primary* sources explored in class. This paper is meant to be part of the broader learning process of the course, and has multiple steps:
 - a. Week 4: Students must meet with professor to propose a topic (5%).
 - b. Week 6: Outline of paper due before class (10%).
 - c. Week 10: Students will present their paper topic and argument to the rest of the class, and receive and give feedback (15%).
 - d. Week 13: Final term paper due (25%).

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Course Schedule

Week 1: What Is *Midrash*?

Primary sources

Genesis 6:1-4 (read at least 6 different translations of this passage, and note their differences)

Secondary readings

Zakovitch and Shinan, "Midrash on Scripture and Midrash within Scripture." *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 31.

Week 2: Genesis 6:1-4 in its Biblical Context

Primary sources

Genesis 5-6, Numbers 13, Job 1:6-8, Job 38:1-7, Isaiah 14:12-20.

Exodus 21:5-6, Exodus 22:6-8.

Secondary readings

Fishbane, Michael. "Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel" in *Midrash and Literature*.

Kugel, James. "The Bible's Earliest Interpreters," in *Prooftexts* 7 (1987), 269-83.

Kugel, James. *How the Bible was Read*, pp. 70-80.

Week 3: The Near Eastern Context of Genesis 6:1-4

Primary sources

CAT 1.4.iii.12-14; CAT 1.17.vi.26-29; CAT 1.10.1.3-5; KAI 26.A.iii.19; Epic of Gilgamesh selections; list of the Apkallu.

Secondary readings

Walton, John. "Literature of the Ancient Near East," in *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*.

Hendel, Ron. "The Nephilim Were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Fall of the Angels*, pp. 11-34.

Week 4 The Book of Enoch: Angels and Demons

Primary sources:

1 Enoch 1-16.

Secondary readings:

Nickelsburg, G. *Jewish Literature from the Bible to the Mishnah*, pp. 46-54.

Reed, Annette Yoshiko. "The Textual Identity, Literary History, and Social Setting of 1 Enoch," *ARC*, pp. 279-296.

*******Mandatory meeting with Professor to propose paper topic this week*******

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Week 5 Second Temple Traditions

Primary sources: Jubilees 4-5, 7-8; 1QGenesis Apocryphon col. 2-5; Philo, *De Gigantibus*.

Secondary readings

VanderKam, James. "Introduction," in *Book of Jubilees*, pp. 11-22, 86-119.

Fitzmyer, J. *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 13-38.

"Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo" in *Mikra*, pp. 441-453.

*Optional: Stuckenbruck, Loren. "The "Angels" and "Giants" of Genesis 6:1-4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation"

Week 6 Versions and Targumim

Primary sources

Selections from Septuagint, Samaritan Targum, Targum Onqelos, Targum Neophiti, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

Secondary readings

"Versions" from the Anchor Bible Dictionary.

Tal, A. "The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch," in *Mikra*, pp. 200-216.

Tov, E. "The Septuagint," in *Mikra*, pp. 161-176.

"Targums" from the Anchor Bible Dictionary.

Alexander, Philip. "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scripture," in *Mikra*, pp. 225-237.

*******Outline of paper due before class*******

Week 7 Classical Rabbinic Midrash

Primary sources

Selections from *Genesis Rabbah*

Secondary readings

Strack and Stemberger, "Midrash", pp. 233-246, 276-283.

Fraade, "Introduction," *From Tradition to Commentary*.

Reed, Annette Yoshiko. "The Parting of the Ways? Enoch and the Fallen Angels in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity" in *Fallen Angels and the history of Judaism and Christianity*, pp. 122-158.

Week 8 Pirqe De-Rabbi Eliezer

Primary sources

Selections from *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*

Secondary readings

Strack and Stemberger, "Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer", pp. 328-330.

Adelman, Rachel. "The Author-ity of Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer" and "The Historical Context," in *The Return of the Repressed: Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*. pp. 23-48.

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Week 9 Medieval Interpretations: Ius Prima Noctis

Primary sources

Rashi on Genesis 5:28-6:5.

Secondary readings

“Rashi” in *Back to the Sources*, 228-242.

Greenstein, Edward L. “Sensitivity to Language in Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah.” edited by Mayer I. Gruber, 6:51-71. Chicago: The Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1993.

Week 10

*******Paper Presentations*******

Week 11 Medieval Interpretations II: Not Angels at All

Primary sources

Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban (Nahmanides) on Genesis 5:28-6:5.

Secondary readings

Holtz, B., ed. “Medieval Bible Commentaries” in *Back to the Sources*, 228-242.

Lockshin, Martin. “Introduction,” in *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir’s Commentary on Genesis*.

Week 12 The Rise of Rationalism

Primary sources

Selections from the *Aqedat Yitzchak*, and the writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

Secondary readings

“Isaac Arama,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

Saperstein, Mark. *Jewish Preaching, 1200-1800*, pp. 44-62, 79-88, 392-393.

Liberles, Robert. “Champion of Orthodoxy: Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch as Religious Leader,” in *AJS Review*.

Week 13 Modern Folktales and Novels & a Return to the Question: What Is Midrash?

Primary sources

Schwartz, Howard. *Miriam’s Tambourine: Jewish Folktales from Around the World*, pp.79-95.

Secondary readings

Yassif, Eli, “Introduction” *The Hebrew Folktale*. Pp.1-7.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit. “Israeli Folklore” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore*, pp. 372-383.

*******Final paper due*******

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University Statement on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

In keeping with the principles of our honor code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact be your own work and not that of another. This includes using online translation programs such as Google Translate or translating online material, such as Wikipedia entries, or excerpting Wikipedia entries without proper citation. It also includes sharing work or jointly completed work (except as authorized in advance). All violations of these principles will be reported to the instructor and may result in a failing grade for the course and additional disciplinary action by the university.

University Statement on Inclusivity/Disabilities