

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism
Spring 2009
Handout #2 (April 2, 2009)
“Biblical Backgrounds: Myth, Scripture, History”

Biblical Basics

Names for the Bible

Hebrew Bible
Jewish Scriptures
The Bible
Tanak
Not “Old Testament”

Divisions of the Bible

Sections

Torah (= “Teaching” or “Law” or even “Constitution”)

Written circa 1000-500 BCE; canonized circa 500 BCE

Nevi'im (= “Prophets”)

Written circa 800-300 BCE; canonized circa 300-200 BCE

Ketuvim (= “Writings”)

Written circa 400-100 BCE; canonized circa 100 CE

Books

Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Nevi'im	Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)
Ketuvim	Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1-2 Chronicles

Genres

Historical Narratives: e.g., Joshua, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings; parts of the Torah

Prophetic texts: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, The Twelve; parts of Daniel

Legal texts: significant portions of the Torah

Songs: Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Solomon

Wisdom texts: Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job

Short stories: Ruth, Esther, parts of Daniel

The Bible Story: History and Ideology

The Story

Torah

Prehistory: God [YHWH] creates the earth, humanity; humanity and God have conflicts that result in reversals of fortune

Ancestors: God makes a deal (covenant) with one family of humanity (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel) that he will be their God, and they will serve him: in return they will get numerous descendants, a land of their own, and God's protection

Enslavement, Exodus, Covenant: God appoints Moses to free the Israelites (descendants of Jacob/Israel) from slavery in Egypt; through God's miraculous intervention, Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, into the desert where they formalize their deal (covenant) with God

Prophets

Settlement and Kingdom: The Israelites enter the land of Canaan, where they forcefully displace the inhabitants; after battling natives and invaders as a loose confederation, the Israelites form a kingdom under Saul, David (who founds the capital, Jerusalem), and Solomon (who builds the First Temple in Jerusalem)

Divided Kingdoms and Destruction: Political infighting leads the Israelites to divide into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, and Judah (capital: Jerusalem) in the south; empires from the east destroy the northern kingdom, and then the southern kingdom: the Israelites' breach of their covenant with God is to blame for their downfall

Prophets/Writings

Exile and Return: The leaders of the southern kingdom (Judah) are taken into Exile in Babylon; when the Persians defeat the Babylonians, they allow the Judahites to return to Jerusalem where they rebuild their city, make the Torah their official law code, and build the Second Temple (all under Persian rule)