



What's wrong with this picture?

Session 1: Feb 11: Foundations; Two Creation Stories; Cain and Abel; Seth

Kugel, James L., *How to Read the Bible*, 2008, Free Press [[Amazon link](#)]

Ehrman, Bart, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 1999, Oxford [[Amazon link](#)]

Assignment:

Overview Timeline [[link](#)]

Basic Ideas Timeline [[link](#)]

Early Hebrew Bible Timeline (Rev E) [[link](#)]

Common Terminology (Rev C) [[link](#)]

The Six Retrojections [see below]

Hayes (Introduction; what the Bible is not) [[link](#)]

Ehrman, pp 27-32 (on myth)

Kugel, pp. 14-17 ("The Four Assumptions")

Kugel, pp. 36-37 ("Filling in the Blanks")

Genesis 1-3 (creation stories) [[link](#)]

Genesis 4:1-16 (Cain slays Abel)

Genesis 4:25-26; 5:1-4 (Seth)

Kugel. pp. 48-68 (Creation; Cain and Abel)

Hayes (Evil in Genesis) [[link](#)]

Questions for Discussion [[link](#)]

Optional Reading:

Kugel, chapter 1 (The Rise of Modern Bible Scholarship), p. 1-45

Kugel, Preliminaries, p. xiii, About the Author, p. 45, and chapter 36 (After Such Knowledge), p.662-689

The Timelines

As with any subject, we need a framework to which we can attach the details. As Elon Musk has observed, “Make sure you understand the fundamental principles, the trunk and big branches, before you get into the leaves / details or there is nothing for them to hang on to.”

A major problem in addressing the Bible is the mistaken notions which are common; they appear to be just the accepted wisdom. I’ve listed six of these below (“The Six Retrojections”) so that you can understand from the outset that they are false.

A second problem is getting the chronology at least approximately right. I’ve discovered that timelines are a terrific way to attack that problem, perhaps because I easily absorb visual information. The Overview Timeline contains perhaps a dozen bits of information which you can probably learn in a few attention-filled minutes. A great way to check on your progress is to try to fill out a blank version of the timeline [[link](#)]; print it out and see how well you do.

The Basic Ideas timeline contains much less information but it’s really important information. You should focus on the relationship of polytheism, monolatry and monotheism to the exile and other events. You should notice the absence of cosmic dualism until well into the Hellenistic period and the influence of Greek (and perhaps Persian) thought. The antagonistic second force was personified as Satan or the Devil; no such thing in the Hebrew Bible until Daniel (c.164 BCE).

The Early Hebrew Bible Timeline was an early effort and less effective but it does provide some information otherwise missing.

The Six Retrojections

There are six common but misleading retrojections which are guaranteed to obscure your understanding: 1) religion as belief; 2) the divine realm as transcendent; 3) evil as an independent force; 4) the afterlife as just deserts; 5) soul/body dualism; and 6) salvation as redemption from sinful embodiment. These are all very late ideas (none before 200 BCE) which Christian interpreters found useful to retroject into the biblical text and, having grown up with these notions, we find it difficult to overcome them when trying to discern the original meaning of the text.

The Books of the Hebrew Bible

Joshua through Kings are called the Deuteronomistic History.

TORAH	NEVIIM: THE PROPHETS	KETUVIM: THE WRITINGS
1) Genesis	6) Joshua	14) Psalms
2) Exodus	7) Judges	15) Proverbs
3) Leviticus	8) 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel	16) Job
4) Numbers	9) 1 Kings and 2 Kings	17) Song of Songs
5) Deuteronomy	10) Isaiah	18) Ruth
	11) Jeremiah	19) Lamentations
	12) Ezekiel	20) Ecclesiastes
	13) The Twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	21) Esther
		22) Daniel
		23) Ezra and Nehemiah
		24) 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles

A short summary of the contents of the books from Hayes's course: [[link](#)]

About Bart Ehrman's *Jesus*

We want to read all of this fabulous presentation but doing so in five weeks is a stretch. The first chapter is one which I would have scrapped had I been the editor; it simply makes the important point that people have been willing to believe that the world is about to end throughout history, particularly if they are in some way oppressed.

The remainder is packed with essential information and the best approach (IMHO) is to read it through as soon as possible so that you can focus on learning the critical bits as we get to them in class.

About Christine Hayes

Christine Hayes became interested in the Hebrew Bible as a Harvard College undergraduate. Given her name, you already know that she is not Jewish and is a woman. You can imagine the level of talent and the quality of Talmudic scholarship which resulted in her appointment to an endowed chair on the Yale faculty. We are lucky that Yale Open Courses recorded her undergraduate Hebrew Bible course [[link](#)] and I encourage you to check it out. We'll be reading edited sections of the transcripts of her lectures from time to time.

About Kugel's *How to Read the Bible*

Not a great title! If you read Preliminaries and the first chapter (highly recommended) you will find it refers to the two very different ways in which the [Hebrew] Bible has been read: 1) by "the ancient interpreters," whose wildly imaginative interpretations based on the Four Assumptions became for Western Civilization the content of the Bible (e.g., the Fall of Man) and by 2) modern bible scholars who approach the text as a human artifact. Kugel is considerably bothered by his conclusion that these two approaches cannot be reconciled.

The Creation Stories (to be discussed in breakout rooms)

Since there are two, the first question is where the first one ends and the second begins (hint: not between chapters or even between verses!). Then the question becomes: are these just two ways of telling about the same event? See how long a list you can make of the unresolvable inconsistencies.

Next we need to ask: which came first? If you consider the conception of the deity in each, that will be a useful hint.

Then, the most significant issue: when was each written and what was the purpose of each author? Does this help explain the difference in the role of women?

Do you have a favorite incident? Mine is 3:21 (of course, there had to be a punishment, but the Lord is all-in-all a good guy).

What two things are wrong with Michelangelo's presentation?



Cain and Abel

Please note that all of the ancient interpreters cited by Kugel and who suggest that Cain was evil date from the Common Era. As I have said before, the personification of evil could occur only after evil as a second antagonistic cosmic force became part of Jewish understanding.

What is Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Kugel, p.61

A **targum** (Aramaic: תרגום 'interpretation, translation, version') was an originally spoken translation of the Hebrew Bible that a professional translator would give in the common language of the listeners when that was not Hebrew. This had become necessary near the end of the first century BCE, as the common language was Aramaic and Hebrew was used for little more than schooling and worship. The translator frequently

expanded his translation with paraphrases, explanations and examples so it became a kind of sermon. (Wikipedia)