

Women and the Kingdom of Israel

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #10

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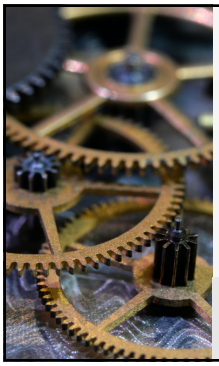


Upcoming Dates

- Monday, December 7
  Position Paper due
- Tuesday, December 15
  Final Exam
- Sunday, November 8
  Responses for Week 9 Due

2

Spring 2027 courses in Ancient History



History of Ancient Rome

Foundation and development of the Roman state, including the rise and decline of the Roman Republic and the establishment and fall of the Empire, with emphasis on its political, economic, social, and cultural achievements.

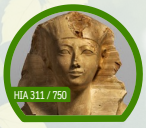
HYBRID Prof. Wilson 3 credits W/Res Int



Classical Myth and Society

A comparison of the origins and development of classical mythology and heroic legend as religious beliefs, their relation to other mythologies, and their adaptation in literature and art from Hesiod and Homer through the present.

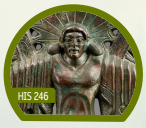
HYBRID Prof. Marianetti 3 credits W/ Int



Women in Antiquity

Examination of the image, role, and status of women in Ancient Greek, Ancient Roman, and other societies as seen through the important literary works of antiquity.

HYBRID Prof. Wilson 3 credits W/Res Int



Civilizations of the Ancient World

A survey of the Mediterranean world, tracing the development of civilization from Mesopotamia and Egypt to ancient Greek City States and the dominion of Rome.

HYBRID Prof. Wilson 3 credits

3

Five things today

- The Kingdom of Israel
- The story of Ruth
- The Babylonian Captivity
- The story of Esther
- Monotheism and gender

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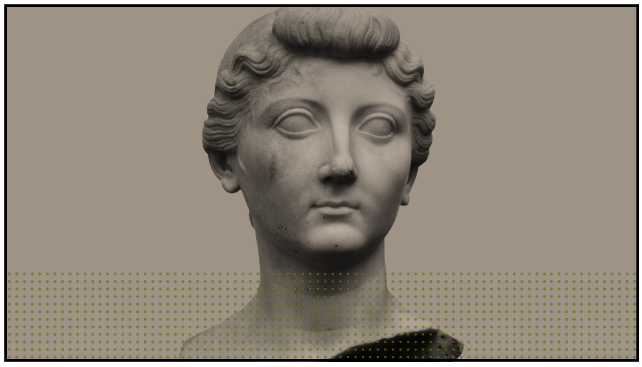

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Quiz #8 | Women and the Kingdom of Israel

1. According to the Book of Esther, Esther saves her people by
   a. defying the law that she cannot present herself to the king and demanding that he do as she asks
   (b) hosting a wine banquet for the king and Haman, at which the besotted king offers her anything
   c. using her authority as the queen to command the guards to prevent the massacre
   d. pleading to God for a miracle

2. In the story of Ruth, after her husband, her brother-in-law, and her father-in-law all die, the Moabite woman Ruth decides to do
   a. wander the Earth as a holy woman
   b. journey to Babylon to become a priestess
   c. stay in Moab alone
   (d) remain loyal to her husband's family and return to his homeland, Judah

3. The Judean landholder whom Ruth meets at the threshing of the grain and who later marries her is
   a. Balthazar
   (b) Boaz
   c. Bucephalus
   d. Jeff

4. In the Book of Esther, the threat to the local Persian Jewish community is sparked by
   (a) Mordecai's refusal to bow to the king's vizier, Haman
   b. the Jewish God's wrath at his people's infidelity
   c. the raging, bloodthirsty personality of the king
   d. a rampage of gazelles

5. Ahasuerus is the name of Esther's
   (a) king
   b. cousin
   c. compact with God
   d. cat

Extra Credit

EC. In the Book of Esther, how is the behavior of Vashti, the previous queen, contrasted with Esther's?

6

Questions about whatever



7

The Kingdom of Israel

8

The Fertile Crescent



9



Sarah Presenting Hagar to Abraham by Louis Jean Francois Lagrenee (1781)

Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar

- Abraham traveled into Canaan with his clan
- Wife was infertile, so she gave him a concubine
  - Result: a son, Ishmael
- Sarah had a miracle baby, Isaac
- Hagar and Ishmael cast out

10

Secondary Source Reading

Sebastian Brock

Reading Between the Lines: Sarah and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis, Chapter 22)

- Viewpoint of Sarah is missing from the story of the sacrifice
  - Left to speculation of later writers trying to plumb the deepest meeting of the sacrifice
  - Depends on age assumed for Isaac
- Multiple paths
  - Sarah was deliberately excluded by god or Abraham
  - Sarah's faith is tested as much as Abraham's, or more
  - Both tested with respect to their roles as father and mother, husband and wife



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The Exodus

- Semitic labor force in Bronze Age Egypt includes many Hebrew tribes
- New Kingdom disrupted at the end of the Bronze Age
- Evidence of Hebrew departure from Egypt comes only from Hebrew legends

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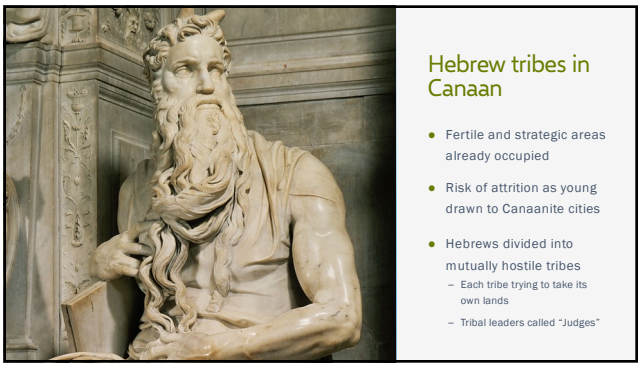

Hebrew tribes in Canaan

- Fertile and strategic areas already occupied
- Risk of attrition as young drawn to Canaanite cities
- Hebrews divided into mutually hostile tribes
  - Each tribe trying to take its own lands
  - Tribal leaders called "Judges"

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Primary Source Reading

The Book of Ruth



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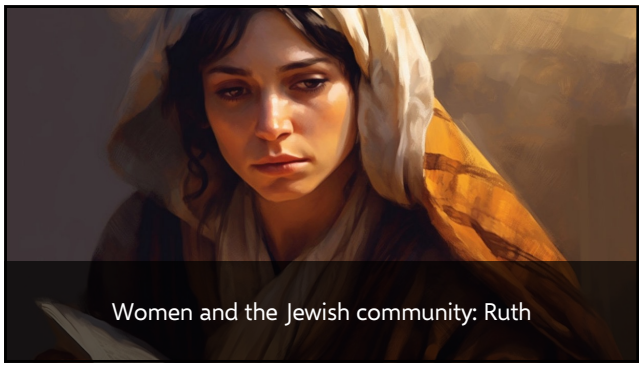
Women and the Jewish community: Ruth

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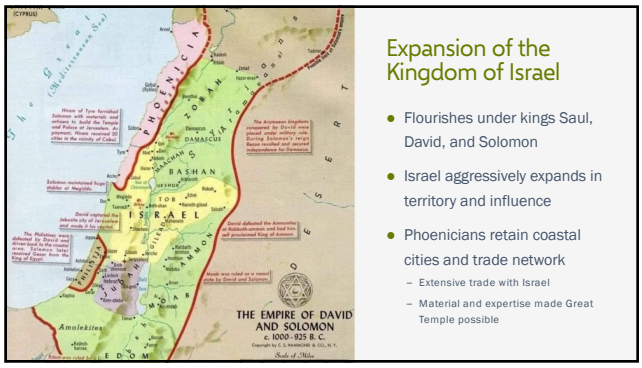
PHOENICIA
DAMASCUS
BASHAN
ISRAEL
THE EMPIRE OF DAVID AND SOLOMON
c. 1000-925 B.C.
EDOM
Expansion of the Kingdom of Israel
Flourishes under kings Saul, David, and Solomon
Israel aggressively expands in territory and influence
Phoenicians retain coastal cities and trade network
Extensive trade with Israel
Material and expertise made Great Temple possible

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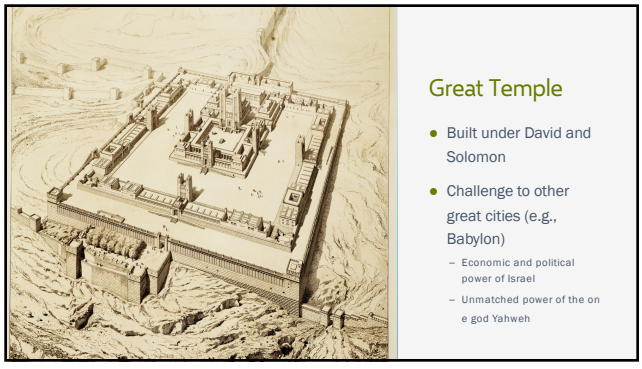
Great Temple
Built under David and Solomon
Challenge to other great cities (e.g., Babylon)
Economic and political power of Israel
Unmatched power of the on e god Yahweh

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Divided Kingdom

- After Solomon, cohesion ends
- Two hostile kingdoms result
  - Kingdom of Israel (Northern)
  - Kingdom of Judah (Southern)
- Northern kingdom has more cities and resources

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Neo-Assyrian Empire

- Called "Neo-Assyrian" because it's the "new" one
  - "Old" Assyrian empire fell with the collapse of the Bronze Age
- Rapid expansion to dominate Mesopotamia, then beyond

20



Deportation of Northern Kingdom (722 BCE)

- Monotheism gives the Hebrews a stronger identity
- Assyrians try to crush Northern Kingdom (Israel) with tributes and oppression
- Finally deport landholders to Assyria
- Northern Kingdom resettled with foreign colonists

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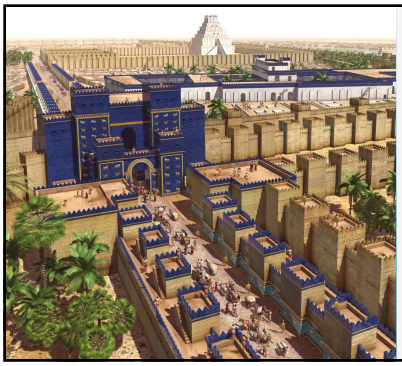

Babylon

- Exerts authority through cultural and technological dominance
- Babylon draws the skilled and wealthy

22



"Tower of Babel"

- Hebrew metaphor for Babylonian arrogance

23



Etemenanki Ziggurat

- Largest ziggurat in the world
- Home of Babylon's patron god, Marduk

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The Babylonian Captivity
(587-538 BCE)

- Southern Kingdom (Judah) resistant to Babylon
- Babylon deports landholders
- In Babylon, Judeans (Jews) fight assimilation
  - Preservation of history and language
  - Food and clothing taboos
  - Circumcision
  - Sabbath
- Jewish identity preserved

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Eve

- Serpent tempts Eve
  - Eat from forbidden tree
  - Get Adam to do it
- Judgments of Yahweh
  - Serpent cursed to drawl on its belly
  - Eve cursed with painful childbearing
  - Adam has to toil and till

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Primary Source Reading

The Book of Esther



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How is Vashti contrasted with Esther?

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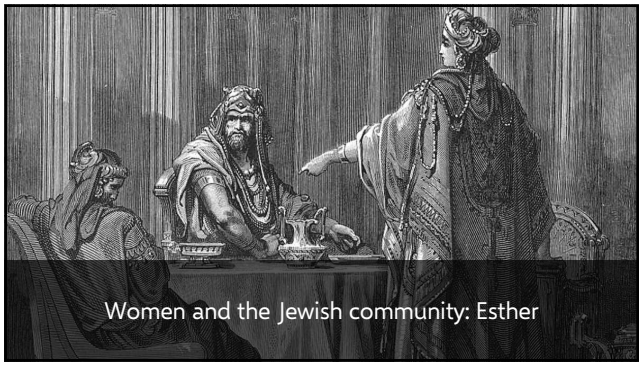
Women and the Jewish community: Esther

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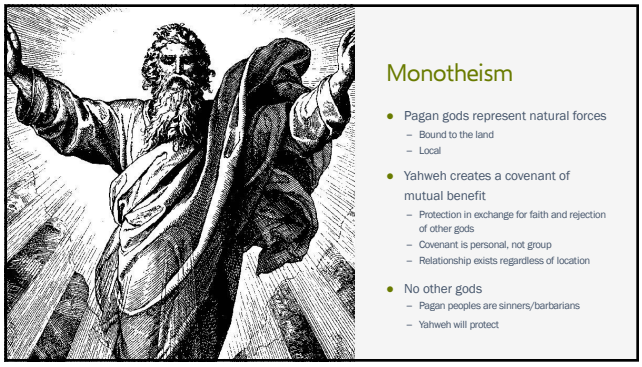
Monotheism
Pagan gods represent natural forces
Bound to the land
Local
Yahweh creates a covenant of mutual benefit
Protection in exchange for faith and rejection of other gods
Covenant is personal, not group
Relationship exists regardless of location
No other gods
Pagan peoples are sinners/barbarians
Yahweh will protect

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Why does monotheism lead to female exclusion?

31


Female exclusion in Jewish religious practice
The covenant creates a mutually conditional relationship
Need to be worthy creates a focus on purity and education
Purity is affected by menstruation
Jews have a longstanding tradition of taboo regarding blood
Menstruation = ritually unpure
Education requires constant presence for all training, holy days, and rituals

32


Secondary Source Reading
Léonie Archer
Notions of Community and the Exclusion of the Female in Jewish History and Historiography
Sense of exclusion varies
Across time
Across class—what we know most about is toward upper end of society
Tend to find ways to assert gender identity through their own communities
Collective expression in public or in an insular way

33



Hellenistic Canaan

- Mix of traditional Jewish and Hellenistic influence
- Conflicts between Pharisees and Sadducees

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Secondary Source Reading

Léonie Archer

The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual, and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine

- Later period when separation reaches the logical extreme
- Only participation publicly is through weeping
- Within the family is profoundly different



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