

Lesson Guide: Class Two

Kings, Priests, and Prophets



Miller Introduction to
Judaism Program

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY



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Lesson Guide for Class #2: Ancient Israel: Kings, Priests, Prophets

Class Summary:

Overview of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient history (Conquest of Canaan to Babylonian Exile) of the Jewish People. Discussion of the ways that the Bible is used in Jewish liturgical life. Examination of selected texts and concepts from Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Explore the tripartite structure of the Tanakh, with an emphasis on understanding the four main types of Biblical literature represented in NaKh (History, Prophecy, Wisdom, Poetry).
- Survey the ancient history of the Jewish People from 1200 BCE – 500 BCE.
- Reflect on the role of the prophets and their contemporary legacy.

Key Vocabulary:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ <i>Tanakh</i> | ▪ <i>Beit ha-Mikdash</i> |
| ▪ <i>Nevi'im</i> | ▪ Korban (“sacrifice”) |
| ▪ <i>Ketuvim</i> | ▪ Kohen (“priest”) |
| ▪ <i>Haftarah</i> | ▪ Babylonian Exile |
| ▪ 12 Tribes | ▪ Diaspora |
| ▪ King David | ▪ Written Torah |
| ▪ King Solomon | ▪ Prophet |

In-Person Teaching Materials:

- Room and door signs
- Name tags and pens
- Chalkboard, white-board, or large flip chart
- Colored markers or chalk
- On One Foot course books or printed PDFs
- Projector, computer & screen if using Class Slide Decks and/or On One Foot videos
- *Recommended: Tanakh for each student*

Online Teaching Materials:

- Zoom Pro Account
- PDF of On One Foot chapter
- PowerPoint Class Slide Deck
- Tanakh to show
- Appropriate background, lighting, and sound setup

Welcome & Ice Breakers (Round II)

In-Person: Students should be encouraged to continue to wear name tags. An all-class go-around in which students say their name and answer a guiding question may be helpful, i.e. “What’s your favorite aspect of Judaism that you have experienced so far?” Or, “What is your biggest question about Judaism?”

Online: Instructor should again review "Welcome and Community Zoom Norms" PowerPoint and remind students to keep the camera on and microphone off and ensuring a safe learning space for all. A short breakout session in small groups with a guiding question and a report back in chat may be helpful in continuing the “get to know you” process.

Guided Tour: “Introducing the Tanakh”

Key Ideas: The Tanakh, also known as the Hebrew Bible, is identical in content with what the Christian world refers to as the “Old Testament.” Jews do not use that term (because we don’t have a New Testament!), and instead refer to our Bible using the acronym: Tanakh, which stands for:

1. **Torah** (Teaching)
2. **Nevi'im** (Prophets)

3. **Ketuvim** (Writings)

The Tanakh includes thirty-nine books. The Nevi'im and Ketuvim sections contain books from four main genres of literature:

1. **History** (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles)
2. **Prophecy** (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah)
3. **Wisdom** (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes)
4. **Poetry** (Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Songs)

In-Person: Instructor should distribute Tanakhim to each (or small group) of students. Have students look at the Tanakh and identify the three sections. Then have them leaf through and give a “guided tour” of the books of Nevi'im and Ketuvim, very briefly identifying the genres and main themes of each book:

Students often find the relationship between Torah and Tanakh particularly confusing. Most (including many Jews) have internalized the idea that the Torah is the entirety of Jewish Scripture. Take your time looking through or they will remain confused for the rest of the class!

Online: Instructor should share screen and navigate to Sefaria to visually illustrate the books that make up the Tanakh, and, as above, give a brief, guided tour of the books identifying the main themes and genres.

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Break

Lecture “Ancient Israel”

The goal of this lecture is to provide the students with an overview of the history of the Biblical period, particularly as captured in the Books of Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

The following are the major events to cover:

1200 BCE

Conquest of Canaan

The Book of Joshua describes the conquest as a series of battles (most famously, the Battle of Jericho) taking place over a compressed time period. The archeological record

suggests a more gradual shift from Canaanite to Israelite culture, beginning in this period (fewer and fewer pig bones found in ancient dump sites!)

1200-1025 BCE

Period of the Judges

Early Israelite civilization was organized as a loose confederation of **Twelve Tribes**, which periodically banded together under a military figure (*shofet*) in response to external threat. A few of the more colorful Judges were Sampson, Gideon, and Deborah.

1025-928 BCE

Israelite Kingship- Saul, David, and Solomon

Under increasing pressure from the Philistine enemy, the Israelites demand a monarch in a scene described in the Book of Samuel. The first king appointed in Saul, whose unhappy rule was plagued by paranoia about a rising star in the court, **David**, who would eventually succeed him. David was the great warrior king of Israel, expanding its borders and establishing Jerusalem as its capital. His son, **Solomon**, would be a more peaceful ruler whose accomplishments would be more religious than military, he built the *Bet ha-Mikdash (The Temple)*, unifying Israelite worship.

950 BCE

Construction of the First Temple

Before the Temple, Israelite worship was spread out across the Land of Israel at tribal shrines. Solomon centralizes Israelite religion with the construction of a building where God's spirit was thought to physically reside on Earth. The primary form of worship at the Temple was animal sacrifice (*korban*) supervised by a dynastic priesthood (*kohanim*) who could supposedly trace their line back to Moses' brother, Aaron.

928- 722 BCE

Divided Monarchy (Judah & Israel)

After Solomon dies the Israelite kingdom splits in two, a Northern confederation of 10 tribes called Israel, and a Southern confederation of two tribes called Judah.

722 BCE

Northern Kingdom lost

The Assyrian Empire, based in Asia Minor, conquers the Near East, including the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Its residents are taken away and resettled across the Empire, leading to their assimilation - becoming the **Ten Lost Tribes**. The Assyrians attempt to conquer Judah but are struck with a plague and retreat.

586- 539 BCE

Babylonian Exile & Destruction of the Temple

In **586 BCE**, the Babylonians conquer Judah and destroy the Temple. A significant portion of the Israelite population is taken into Exile in Babylonia. When the Persians conquer Babylon and permit the Israelites to return and rebuild their Temple (the Decree of Cyrus the Great), many elect to stay in Babylonia and form the first permanent **Diaspora** community.

515 BCE

Reconstruction of 2nd Temple

A portion of the community does return and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. In response to the needs of an increasingly diasporic Jewish community, stories that were originally oral start to be collected and written down, and we see **the first references to the Written Torah**, read aloud by the post-exilic leader, Ezra, at this time.

Key takeaways from the end of this story:

The Babylonian Exile leads to the beginning of the Diaspora and the finalization of the Written Torah (the “portable homeland” that allows Jews to be Jewish anywhere in the world.) This is the beginning on an ongoing trend in Jewish history of adaptation to survive.

Break

Text Study: “Prophets”

Discuss what is a prophetic book by reading selections from Abraham Joshua Heschel’s essay at the start of *The Prophets* called: “What Manner of Man is the Prophet, as well as the haftarah from Yom Kippur day (Isaiah 58), first in chavruta/breakouts and then as a whole group.

Discuss the following questions:

Drawing from Isaiah and Heschel, how do you understand the prophetic job description? (Not predictors of the future, but social critics and advocates for God to the People and the People to God.)

Who, in your opinion, are some contemporary heirs to the Prophets? (Prophets as social justice advocates, their message continues to inspire Jewish and non-Jewish involvement in activism.)

Wrap Up and Reflection

Journal Prompt: "My experience of the Bible in my life so far has been..."

Instructors should be checking for understanding throughout the lesson and regularly pausing for questions. However, it is essential to do so at the close of each class. In addition to using the journal prompts included in coursebook, the instructor may wish to do a group check for understanding using one of the following methods:

- As a whole class, have students go around and briefly state/write in chat one thing they learned/that surprised them/that interested them in class.
- Have students divide into pairs and share with their partner something they learned/that surprised them/that particularly interested them.

If you want to check that the students understand primary content, at the end of this class, students should be able to name the three parts of the Tanakh and the four genres of Biblical literature, name some important events in the timeline of Ancient Israel, and reflect on the role of the Prophet.

At Home Work

Ensure that students are registered for the On One Foot Video Companion. Students should be told to watch the "Ancient Israel" video and answer the review questions and journal prompt.

**The Hebrew Bible is broken down into three sections.
The acronym for these sections is:**



Each week we chant a section of the Torah, called a:
PARASHA

We also chant a portion of the Prophets, called a:
HAFTARAH

On five major holidays we chant a book from the Writings, called a:
MEGILLAH

Sitting on my bookshelf is a comic book version of the Bible titled, *God's Redemptive Story*. I love the title, because it is almost exactly how I think about the Tanakh: First, the Tanakh is a collection of books about God — the compendium of centuries of our ancestors' thinking about who God is, how God relates to us, and what it means to be human in relation to the Ultimate. Second, it is a collection of books about God's redemption, or at least the redemptive promise God offers humanity — how all human beings struggle to flourish despite our cynicism and insecurities and how God yearns for and invites us to thrive. And,

third, the Tanakh lures us toward God's redemptive promise through story, the most powerful and unique of human communication tools. The Tanakh takes us on a journey from slavery to freedom and back again; and, through those stories, as with all good stories, talks about you and me, here and now. This all may sound kind of radical. Indeed, it may not be the Bible as it is usually referenced in our culture. But I believe it is the Bible as it was always meant to be.

Rabbi Michael Knopf

Temple Beth El, Richmond, VA

Megillot for the Holidays

Song of Songs

Pesach

Song of Songs uses extensive imagery of springtime -- trees budding, flowers blooming, etc. Passover is celebrated in the spring season because its theme of national re-birth and liberation is mirrored by the natural world's annual re-birth and liberation from the desolation of winter.

Ruth

Shavuot

Ruth tells the story of an individual accepting Torah and being adopted into the Jewish People. Shavuot commemorates the Jewish People's communal acceptance of Torah at Mount Sinai. Ruth also meets Boaz during the summer harvest season, which corresponds to the season of Shavuot.

Lamentations

Tisha B'av

Lamentations (Eicha) retells the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians. Tisha b'Av commemorates the tragedies of Jewish history, in particular the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

Ecclesiastes

Sukkot

Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) emphasizes the fragility of life, in which everything has its season — both for joy and for weeping. Sukkot's central symbol, the sukkah (booth), is also a symbol of temporality and fragility. Both the book and the holiday also place an emphasis on gratitude for our physical gifts, as Ecclesiastes writes: "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do" (Ecc 9:7). Sukkot, as a harvest festival, is also a celebration of life's bounty.

Esther

Purim

Esther tells the story of the salvation of the Persian Jewish community from the wicked plot of Haman, which is celebrated with the holiday of Purim. The Megillah of Esther is so famous that when people use the term "The Megillah" they often simply mean the Book of Esther.