

**THE BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES**  
HEBR ST 368; HISTORY 368; JEWISH 368; RELIG ST 368  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Fall 2009

**Class:** M W F 9:55-10:45, Sterling 1421

**Instructor:** Dr. Richard Benton

**Office:** 1352 Van Hise Hall

**Office Hours:** Wed and Fri 8:45-9:45; and by appointment

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**Course description and goals:**

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Why did educated, medieval people read the Bible? What did they get out of it? Why did they talk about it in the way they did? The Bible has always generated and reflected the social controversies of its readers. As modern readers, we come to the Bible with a set of inherited assumptions. Medieval readers often make completely different assumptions about the Bible than the ones we are accustomed to. Moreover, their writings represent intriguing primary sources for reconstructing the intellectual life of the middle ages. Medieval readers used different reading strategies than we do; they asked different questions of the text than we do; they were bothered by different details than we are. The goals of this class are:

1. understanding how biblical commentaries inform us about medieval thought;
2. discerning the similarities and differences in thought among medieval commentators;
3. uncovering our own presuppositions about the Bible and how they compare and contrast to those of the historical commentators we read.

To these ends, this class consists of two parts. The first half of the class will present general, background material. We will look at a brief history of interpretation of the Bible, ancient approaches to the Bible, and an outline of medieval history. With the “big picture” in mind, we will delve into the commentaries of individual writers in the second half of the class. Jewish commentaries will comprise the majority of the selections we read, although we will read them alongside Christian commentaries, as well.

**How to read ancient commentaries**

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Reading ancient commentaries is a difficult task. This class will develop the skills necessary for reading ancient commentaries. To this end, one must always keep the following questions in mind.

1. What does the biblical text say?
2. What is the context of the biblical commentator? What time period and geographical area does he or she come from? What language did he or she originally write in?
3. What is the point the commentator is trying to make? How is this influenced by the commentator’s context?
4. How is the commentator using the given biblical text to make his or her point?

## Required Texts:

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- *The Bible*. Use a modern English translation, such as:
  - *Jewish Publication Society Tanakh* (at the bookstore)
  - *New Revised Standard Version*
- Barbara H. Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages, Volume 2: From c. 900 to c. 1500*, third ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Readings will be drawn from this book, but one should constantly refer to it to understand the historical context of other writings.
- Course reader. This can be purchased at Student Print (Room 3301 SAC, 333 East Campus Mall). The same readings will also be available on the Learn@UW site.

## Requirements and Grading:

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- Research Paper (25%):  
Students will write one analysis paper of 7-10 double-spaced pages. I will offer three commentary texts. You may choose among these texts to write your paper, or, if you would like to choose another text, you are free to discuss a different text with me. You will be expected to state the history of the text briefly, present the way the author approaches the biblical text, and explain the author's overall point in the portion you have chosen. I will present the three choices after the midterm exam. You must notify me of your choice by **October 23<sup>rd</sup>**. This notification constitutes 10% of your total paper grade. The paper will be due *in class in hard copy* on **December 4<sup>th</sup>**. A late topic or paper will be reduced by one half-letter grade for every day it is late (A to AB, AB to B, etc.).
- Discussion & Participation (25%)  
Active participation in a discussion section is essential for this class. "Active" includes, but is not limited to, the following
  1. Each student must bring the required reading(s) for the class period to class.
  2. Students are expected to read the readings before the lecture under which it is indicated. You should be able to identify the sections you understand and those you do not.
  3. For each class period you will be required to *write down* two questions total for each day's reading(s). (The questions should come from separate readings, if possible.) You will be called on to participate in class discussion, including presenting your questions. You will be required to turn in your questions on occasion, unannounced, which will constitute 10% of your discussion grade.
  4. Each student will enthusiastically, creatively, and respectfully engage in discussion through asking questions, making comments, and interacting with the professor and classmates.
- Exams (45%): You must come to the exam the day it is given. Exceptions can be made in the case of an emergency. If possible, please provide documentation (note from a doctor, Dean's office, etc.).
  - Midterm (20%) on **October 12<sup>th</sup>**. The midterm will consist of *at least* identification and essay questions to test your knowledge of the historical background covered in the course. You will draw on this knowledge for the rest of the semester.

- Final (25%) on **December 19<sup>th</sup>, 7:45AM - 9:45AM**. If you are not able to make this time because of religious observance, please see me within the first three weeks of the class to make other arrangements.
- Lecture Series Report (5%)  
You must attend one of the lectures on the website of the Center for Jewish Studies (<http://jewishstudies.wisc.edu/lectures/>). I have posted these lectures on the Learn@UW site for this class.

All students of this class must write a one-page summary of the lecture you attend. The summary *must* include the date of the lecture, the name of the lecture and lecturer, the main point the lecturer was making, and how he or she made his or her point. It *may* include to what extent you were convinced by the presentation, as long as your opinion is explained. This write-up is **due no more than one week after the lecture you choose takes place**. This assignment will replace the lectures of November 20 & 23, which are cancelled because the professor will be away at an academic conference.

### Grading Summary and Scale

	Total Points	Grade Scale	
Analysis Paper	25	94-100	A
Discussion	25	87-93	AB
Midterm	20	80-86	B
Final	25	73-79	BC
Lecture Paper	5	66-72	C
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	60-65	D
		0-59	F

Excused absences for religious holidays must be arranged *in advance* with the professor during the first three weeks of the semester. The professor will be sensitive to students' religious preferences, and will, if at all possible, accommodate student requests for an excused absence.

Students with Disabilities: Please contact me in the first three weeks of the semester if you have a documented requirement for accommodation to obtain equal access to this class or to any assignment I may give. If you have any questions about this I hope you will also feel free to contact me. I am quite willing to work with students to find the best way to achieve this accommodation.

### Paper Protocol

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1. Times New Roman or Arial font
2. 1" margin on all four sides
3. Double-spaced; no spacing between paragraphs
4. Turn in hard copy, *not email*, unless explicitly allowed by professor
5. Half-grade lower for every day it is late (A → AB, AB → B, etc.)

## Academic Integrity and Etiquette

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**Integrity:** The following are examples of violations of standards for academic honesty and are subject to academic sanctions: cheating on exams, submitting collaborative and/or others' work as one's own, falsifying course work, stealing examinations or course materials, submitting work previously submitted in another course (unless specifically approved by the instructor), falsifying documents or signing an instructor's or administrator's name to any document or form, or aiding another student in any of these actions. Cheating on exams or assignments will be dealt with under University of Wisconsin System Administrative code, chapter 14. For more information see <http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html>.

***Remember:***

- If it is not your idea, you must give credit by citing the original work. If you reword someone else's idea, it is not your idea. USING ANOTHER PERSON'S IDEAS WITHOUT A CITATION IS PLAGIARISM! For ancient texts, name of work (Genesis, Qohelet, etc.) and chapter, verse/line is enough. For class texts, last name and page number suffices. You can find information on how to cite sources in general here: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>
- Internet sources are not your ideas. Hence, you must cite them. If you cut and pasted, you must cite. USING IDEAS OR TEXT FROM THE INTERNET WITHOUT A CITATION IS PLAGIARISM! Also, some internet sources are bad and/or inaccurate, so be judicious in using them. Do not use "Wikipedia" except as a starting point for research.

**Etiquette:** Attendance in class is very important, since there is no single source in the library or the internet for the material covered in class. Attendance will not be taken directly, but the ability to complete the course assignments will indirectly reflect your attendance. Timeliness helps provide a positive learning experience for the whole class. Class will begin and end on time. Out of respect for your classmates, please also refrain from any other behavior that might be distracting. Students whose behavior in class is disruptive can expect a significant reduction in their final grade.

### Tentative Schedule

All readings and assignments are due on the day indicated. The Bible will be necessary every class period unless the professor says otherwise. Readings in [brackets] are optional.

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
	<b>SEPT 2 Introduction</b>	<b>4 What is the Bible?</b> Bowley, "A Library of Tradition"
<b>7 LABOR DAY</b>	<b>9 First stage of interpretation (cont.)</b> Schiffman 5.6.6, 7.3.1; The Book of Matthew, ch. 5	<b>11 Second stage of interpretation</b> Holtz, "Midrash"
<b>14 Second stage of interpretation (cont.)</b> Smalley, "The Letter and the Spirit" [Grant, "The School of Alexandria" and "The School of Antioch"]	<b>16 Medieval Historical Outline</b> Rosenwein, ch. 4	<b>18 ROSH HASHANAH (No class)</b>
<b>21 Medieval Historical Outline (cont.)</b> Rosenwein, ch. 5	<b>23 Jews in the Middle Ages</b> Scheindlin, "Merchants & Intellectuals . . ."; Marcus, "Jewish-Christian Symbiosis"	<b>25 Approaches</b> <i>Jewish Encyclopedia</i> , "Peshat"
<b>28 YOM KIPPUR (No class)</b>	<b>30 Approaches (cont.)</b> Smalley, "The Letter and the Spirit" (again)	<b>OCT 2 Examples of Approaches</b> Saadiya Gaon (selections); Maimonides (selections); Aquinas (selections)
<b>5 Examples of Approaches (cont.)</b> Saadiya Gaon (selections); Maimonides (selections); Aquinas (selections)	<b>7 Examples of Approaches (cont.)</b> Saadiya Gaon (selections); Maimonides (selections); Aquinas (selections)	<b>9 Review</b>
<b>12 MIDTERM EXAM</b>	<b>14 Genesis</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)	<b>16 Genesis (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)
<b>19 Genesis (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)	<b>21 Genesis (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)	<b>23 Genesis (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)
<b>26 Genesis (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Rashbam (selections); Bahya (selections)	<b>28 Exodus</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)	<b>30 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)
<b>NOV 2 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)	<b>4 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)	<b>6 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)
<b>9 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)	<b>11 Exodus (cont.)</b> Rashi (selections); Abraham Ibn Ezra (selections); Rashbam (selections); Eckhart (selections)	<b>13 Song of Songs</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)
<b>16 Song of Songs</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>18 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>20 PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE</b>

<b>23 PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE</b>	<b>25 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>27 THANKSGIVING</b>
<b>30 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>DEC 2 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>4 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)
<b>7 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>9 Song of Songs (cont.)</b> Bernard of Clairvaux (selections); Rabag (selections); Nicholas of Lyra (selections); Ezra b. Solomon (selections)	<b>11 Catch-Up Day</b> TBA
<b>14 Last Class</b> Review, Summary		

**FINAL EXAM: Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 7:45AM - 9:45AM**