



WORLD LITERATURE I (ENG 251)

Hebrew Bible Study Guide

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THE HEBREW BIBLE AS LITERATURE

For the purpose of this course, we will not be considering the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text, although of course it is just that for millions of people. Nor will we be considering it as the earlier part of the Christian Bible, which includes the "Old Testament" along with the "New Testament." We will be considering the Hebrew Bible as an ancient literary text that is both embedded in history and tells of its own history, the story of the origins and formation of the Hebrew people and their special, intense and difficult relationship with Jahweh, the God of the Hebrew Bible. That will allow us to make interesting comparisons with other literary texts that we will study in this course, including the *Story of Gilgamesh*, and the *Aeneid*.

This approach can be quite challenging to people who have grown up approaching the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text and/or as a precursor to and predictor of Christianity and/or Islam. This approach requires that people suspend their learning and belief about the Hebrew Bible and try to approach it as one of many literary texts studied in this course.

An example of the challenge of this approach is the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, a story of the origins of humanity that explains (among other things) the difficulty of childbirth and the hardship of wresting a living from the earth. Within Genesis and within the Hebrew Bible, this is NOT a story of original sin, which is a later, Christian concept. However, if one studied the story of Adam and Eve in a Christian Sunday School or Bible Study group, it was almost certainly taught as the explanation of original sin as the cause of the fallen state of humanity. This interpretation owes much to St. Augustine, not to the Hebrew Bible, as Elaine Pagels points out convincingly in *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (131).

So, for the purpose of this course, try to suspend your beliefs about the nature and meaning of the Hebrew Bible and attempt to read it as freshly as possible, as an ancient story you have never read before. I think, whatever your beliefs about the Hebrew Bible, you will discover new and interesting ways of thinking about it, and you will also discover exciting ways to compare stories in the Hebrew Bible to other ancient stories that, while perhaps not considered sacred texts (or at least not any longer), tell of the wills of gods, the connections of human destiny to those gods, and the long and painful nature of historical destiny.

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TEXT OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

The Hebrew Bible was written over a long time by various people and groups. It combines oral stories, many with roots in the ancient Middle East, with more specific and possibly factual history about the Hebrew people's origins, wanderings, sojourn in Egypt, more wanderings, invasion of Canaan, development of the monarchy, dispersal to Babylon, return to Israel, etc.. As Robert Alter writes: "Any literary account of the Hebrew Bible must recognize...this quality of extreme heterogeneity. ... From one point of view, it is not even a unified collection but rather a loose anthology that reflects as much as nine centuries of Hebrew literary activity, from the Song of Deborah ... to the Book of Daniel (second century B. C. E.). The generic variety of this anthology is altogether remarkable, encompassing as it does historiography, fictional narratives, and much that is a mixture of the two, lists of laws, prophecy in both poetry and prose, aphoristic and reflective works, cultic and devotional poems, laments and victory hymns, love poems, genealogical tables, etiological tales, and much more (12)." Yet, Alter goes on to say that "...the idea of the Hebrew Bible as a sprawling, unruly anthology is no more than a partial truth, for the retrospective act of canonization has created a unity among the disparate texts..." (13).

Canonization is the process of deciding which parts of a text or set of texts are the "correct" parts and which can be discarded as non-essential or even false. According to Frank Kermode, "Even the most learned explanations of how the constituent books found themselves together in a canon are highly speculative and have to deal with an intractable mixture of myth and history. Once a sacred book is fully formed, deemed to be unalterable and wholly inspired, it acquires a prehistory suitable to its status and related only very loosely to historical fact or probability. The real history involves all manner of external influences: for example the closing of the Jewish canon must be in some sense consequent upon the waning of Hebrew as a spoken language, and upon the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., when the book rather than the Temple cult became central to religion.... Thus canon formation is affected by what seem on the face of it to be political, economic, and technological forces without immediate religious or literary relevance..." Kermode explains that there is a legendary account of the formation of the Hebrew Bible "...that tells of the destruction of the sacred books during the Babylonian Captivity and their reconstruction by the divinely inspired memory of Ezra." However, Kermode goes on to remark that "[a] more scholarly account would say that the importance of the Law after the return from Babylon speeded the process by which all the disparate material in the Pentateuch acquired final form and authority..." Scholars generally agree that the canon of the Hebrew Bible was set around 100 C.E. (600-601).

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NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT FOR THE HEBREW BIBLE

The Bible is the product of minds that were exposed to and influenced by and reacting to the ideas and cultures of their day.... [C]omparative study of the literature of the Ancient Near East and the Bible reveals the shared cultural and literary heritage at the same time that it reveals great differences between the two. In the literature of the Bible some members of Israelite society ... broke radically with the prevailing norms of the day.... The persons responsible for the final editing and shaping of the Bible, somewhere from the seventh to the fifth or fourth century BCE ... were members of this group.... they had a specific worldview and they imposed that worldview on the older traditions and stories that are found in the Bible. That radical new worldview in the Bible was monotheism.

Cuneiform tablets that were inscribed with the great literature of Mesopotamian civilizations were uncovered and when they were deciphered they shed astonishing light on biblical religion. Scholars delighted in pointing out all of the parallels in theme and language and plot and structure between biblical stories and Ancient Near Eastern stories. So more than a thousand years before the Israelite legend of Noah and the ark you have Mesopotamians telling the stories [of] Ziusudra, or in some versions Utnapishtim who also survived a great flood by building an ark on the instruction of a deity, and the flood destroys all life, and he sends out birds to scout out the dry land, and so on. So with parallels like these, it was argued, it was clear that the religion of the Israelites was not so different from the religions of their polytheistic or pagan neighbors. They also had a creation story. They had a flood story. They did animal sacrifices. They observed purity taboos. Israelite religion was another Ancient Near Eastern religion and they differed from their neighbors only over the number of gods they worshiped: one or many. It was just a more refined, more highly evolved, version of Ancient Near Eastern religion.

[T]his evolutionary view, or evolutionary model, was challenged by ... Kaufmann in the 1930's. ... Kaufman asserted that the monotheism of Israel wasn't ... the natural outgrowth of the polytheism of an earlier age. It was a radical break with it. It was a total cultural and religious discontinuity. It was a polemic against polytheism and the pagan worldview. That's implicit, he says, throughout the biblical text. It's been said that Kaufman replaces the evolutionary model with a revolutionary model.

Now in Kaufman's view the similarities...between the Israelites and Ancient Near Eastern religion and cultures ... were in the end similarities in form and external structure, appearance.... They differed in content. Sure they both have animal sacrifice. Sure they both have ritual purity laws. Sure they share certain stories and legends. But these have been adopted by the

Israelites and transformed ... into vehicles that convey the basic ideas of the monotheistic worldview. So a similarity in form doesn't mean a similarity in function.... The ritual cult of the Israelites may look like that of their neighbors but it functioned very differently; its purpose was drastically different from that of Israel's neighbors. The Israelites like their neighbors may have set up a king over themselves. But Israelite monarchy differed from Canaanite monarchy in significant ways because of their monotheism....the meaning and function of Israel's cult, of Israel's king, of its creation stories or any of its other narratives--they derive from the place of those items within the larger cultural framework or worldview of Israel and that larger framework or worldview is one of basic monotheism.

[Professor Hayes presents and analyzes both views about the formation of the Hebrew religion--the evolutionary one and the revolutionary one. This is an area open for study and discussion; there is not a single correct answer. If you are intrigued and want to know more, go to her wonderful [Introduction to the Old Testament \(Hebrew Bible\)](#), from which this is abridged. It is an Open Source Course at Yale, which means that anyone is free to audit the lectures.]

(This section is abridged from the lecture by Professor Hayes, "The Hebrew Bible in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting: Biblical Religion in Context," from her course RLST 145: Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), an Open Source online offering from Yale University.)

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PARTS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Part One: Torah (Instruction, Teaching)

- Genesis
 - Chapters 1-11--God's creation of the world, the first humans, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the flood, Babel, etc.
 - Chapters 12-50--stories of the ancestors of the Israelites, the story of Joseph, and the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt
- Exodus
 - Story of Moses, from Egypt to Mount Sinai
 - God's covenant with Israel
 - Instructions for building God's tabernacle
- Leviticus
 - Instructions about sacrificial cult and priestly rituals
 - Initiation of Aaron and his sons as priests
 - Laws about purity and impurity (ritual and moral)
- Numbers
 - Israelites wander in the wilderness
 - More instructions
- Deuteronomy
 - Three speeches by Moses before the Israelites enter Canaan
 - Moses dies

Part Two: Nevi'im (Prophets)

- Former Prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings)
 - Joshua --invasion of Canaan and distribution of land to Israelite tribes
 - Judges--heroic "judges" who led Israelites to military victories
 - 1 Samuel--the last judge and a prophet; anoints the first king, Saul; Saul and David
 - 2 Samuel--King David's affair with Bathsheba; revolt of his son Absalom
 - 1 Kings--David's last years and the reign of Solomon
 - Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem
 - Ten northern tribes separate to form kingdom of Israel
 - Two southern tribes are kingdom of Judah
 - Elijah promotes Yahwism in north and conflicts with king Ahab
 - 2 Kings--Elijah and Elisha
 - overthrow of Ahab
 - succession of kings in Israel
 - destruction of kingdom of Israel by Assyrians in 722 B.C.E.
 - southern kingdom destroyed by Babylonians in 587 B.C.E.
- Latter Prophets (from mid 8th to 5th century)
 - Isaiah

- Jeremiah--end of southern kingdom
- Ezekiel--in Babylon
- The Book of the Twelve
 - Hosea
 - Joel
 - Amos
 - Obadiah
 - Jonah
 - Micah
 - Nahum
 - Habbakuk
 - Zephaniah
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi

Part Three: Ketuvim (Writings)

- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Job
- The Five Scrolls
 - Song of Songs
 - Ruth
 - Lamentations
 - Ecclesiastes
 - Esther
 - Daniel
 - Ezra
 - Nehemiah
 - 1 Chronicles
 - 2 Chronicles

(following Christine Hayes' lecture, "Synopsis of the Contents of the TaNaKh (the Jewish Bible)" from her course, RLST 145: Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), an Open Source online offering from Yale University.)

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ISRAELITE CHRONOLOGY

- 1800-1700 Abram (Abraham)
- 1700-1600 Descent of Israel into Egypt
- c. 1280 The Exodus
- c. 1250-1200 Conquest of Canaan
- c. 1020-1000 Samuel and Saul
- c. 1000-961 United Monarchy of David
- c. 961-922 Empire of Solomon
- c. 922 Death of Solomon; division of the kingdom
- c. 722-721 Fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria)
- c. 650-600 Deuteronomy
- c. 587-538 Fall of Jerusalem; the Babylonian Exile
- c. 538 The Return
- c. 520-515 Rebuilding of the Temple
- c. 450-400 Ezra and Nehemiah

(adapted from *The Book of J*, 7)

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DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

In the mid-eighteenth century...Jean Astrucargued...Moses was drawing from two separate long documents, which he identified as J [Jahweh] and E [Elohim]. They used different names for God, and he was drawing on those in his composition of the Torah.

[In] 1878...Julius Wellhausen...wrote...*The History of Israel*, and he presented...the Documentary Hypothesis....that the historical or narrative sections of the Bible—Genesis...through 2 Kings--is comprised of four identifiable source documents that have been woven together....he argued that these documents date to different periods and reflect very different interests and concerns. These four prior documents, he says, were woven together by somebody or some group...to form the narrative core of the Bible.

Wellhausen argued that these sources therefore do not tell us about the times or situations they purport to describe, so much as they tell us about the beliefs and practices of Israelites in the period in which they were composed.... So although the sources claim to talk about events from creation...forward, Wellhausen says, no, they really can only be used to tell us about the beliefs and religion of Israel from the tenth century, which is when he thinks the oldest was written, and forward.

Now his work created a sensation. It undermined...traditional claims about the authorship of God and the work of Moses. It's still disputed by conservative groups and Roman Catholic authorities, although Roman Catholic scholars certainly teach it and adopt it.

The four sources...identified by Wellhausen are...the J source and the E source...P, the priestly source, and D, which is primarily the book of Deuteronomy.

Source critics were able to come up with a list of what they believed were the main characteristics of the various sources. So the main characteristics of the J source, which begins with the second creation story...are:

- (1) that it uses a personal name Yahweh for God from the time of creation...;
- (2) It describes God very anthropomorphically. It's the J source that has God shut the door of the ark after Noah. It's the J source that has God smelling the sacrifice after the Flood, the sacrifice that Noah offers...;
- (3) J has a very vivid and concrete earthy style; and,
- (4) It uses the name Mount Sinai to refer to the place where the Israelites with Moses will conclude the covenant with God.

...source critics felt that a clue to the dating of the J source could be found in the passage in which God promises a grant of national land to the Israelites. The boundaries of the land are given there as the River of Egypt, the Nile, and the Euphrates. It was argued by some that those were basically the borders of the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon. ... The argument is that under David and Solomon the empire reached that boundary and so clearly this is a writer from the tenth century who's seeking to justify Israel's possession of its kingdom from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates; it's presenting that kingdom as a fulfillment of a promise of land that God made to Israel's ancient ancestors. For that reason source critics thought J must date to about the tenth century and to the time of perhaps King Solomon.

The E source, which source critics say begins around Genesis 15 is really the most fragmentary. It seems to have been used to supplement the J source.... sometimes it seems very difficult to isolate, and there's a lot of debate over this, but the E source's characteristics are that

- (1) it uses Elohim... [to refer] to the God of Israel;
- (2) it has a much less anthropomorphic view of God;
- (3) God is more remote. There aren't the direct face-to-face revelations in the E source; most communications from the divine are indirect. They'll be through messengers or dreams and;
- (4) there's also an emphasis on prophets and prophecy in the E source....;
- (5) The style is more abstract, a little less picturesque, and;
- (6) the E source uses a different name for the mountain where the covenant was concluded.... Horeb.

The E source seems to be concerned primarily with the northern tribes, therefore the northern kingdom. And so source theorists decided that it was most likely composed in the northern kingdoms about the ninth century.

And then, according to this hypothesis, the J and E sources were combined, primarily J with E being used to supplement it, probably somewhere in the...late eighth century; and that was the backbone of the Pentateuchal [Torah] narrative. It covers the early history of humankind, of Israel's early ancestors known as the patriarchs and matriarchs. Their stories are told in Genesis. It contained the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt in the book of Exodus, and the stories of the wandering in the wilderness that are found in the book of Numbers. The anonymous scribe or editor who combined these sources didn't care to remove any redundant material or contradictory material....

Now there are two other sources... D and P. D, which is the Deuteronomistic source, is essentially the book of Deuteronomy. The

book of Deuteronomy ... purports to be three speeches delivered by Moses as the Israelites are poised on the east side of the Jordan River.... But according to the source theorists it clearly reflects the interests of settled agrarian life. It doesn't reflect the interests of people who have been wandering around nomadically.... D is the one source in the Bible that clearly insists that one central sanctuary only is acceptable to Yahweh.... Jerusalem is not actually mentioned in Deuteronomy, that's a later reading, but the place where God will cause his name to dwell, and only at the temple there, can there be sacrifices.... There are other books...where it's clear that there are local shrines, local sanctuaries, local priests who are offering sacrifices for people throughout the land. But Deuteronomy insists: one central sanctuary. All of the outlying alters and sacred places must be destroyed.

P is the Priestly source...found mostly in the books of Leviticus and the non-narrative portions of Numbers. Now the major characteristics of P, the Priestly source, are

- (1) a great concern with religious institutions, with the sacrificial system, with the Sabbath, with holidays, with rituals like circumcision, the Passover, dietary restrictions... the system of ritual purity and impurity, and also holiness, ethical holiness and cultic or ritual holiness....
- (2) God is transcendent, and even perhaps remote...
- (3) [interest] in covenants, in censuses, in genealogies.

...And because P elements often serve...as a bridge between stories...the source critics felt that priestly writers were probably responsible for the final editing of the Bible, bringing together J and E and D and adding their materials and finally editing the work.

...[A]ccording to Wellhausen...the priestly school drew together all of this older material, added some of its own editorial material--bridges, introductions, conclusions--inserted the large priestly documents of Leviticus and Numbers, and so the Torah...is really the result of five centuries of religious and literary activity. And this of course is a very...different portrait from traditional claims about the authorship of the Pentateuch by one man, Moses, in approximately the fourteenth century B.C.E.

[T]he documentary hypothesis... posits hypothetical sources, traditions and documents to explain the current shape of the Torah the way we have it.... As a next step the sources are assigned relative dates...and then they're analyzed to reveal the different stages of Israel's religious history. And so source criticism is also known as historical criticism because it's a tool for getting at the history, not just at the text, but ultimately a history of Israelite religion....

It needs to be remembered that the documentary hypothesis is only a hypothesis.... none of the sources posited by critical scholars has been found independently: we have no copy of J, we have no copy of E, we have no copy of P by itself or D by itself. So these reconstructions are based on guesses. Some of them are excellent...guesses, very well supported by evidence, but some of them are not.

So most biblical scholars today do accept some version of Wellhausen's theory--yes, we feel the Bible is composed of different sources. We don't always have tremendous confidence, though, in some of the finer details and conclusions of his work and the work of other scholars who followed after him.

(The above section is abridged from the lecture by Professor Hayes, "Critical Approaches to the Bible," from her course RLST 145: Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), an Open Source online offering from Yale University.)

According to Marc Zvi Brettler, one of the editors of *The Jewish Study Bible*, "We do not know how these various sources and legal collections, which now compose the Torah, came together to form a single book. ... Certainly not all ancient Israelite traditions were preserved in the Torah. Much was probably lost. Without knowing what was lost, we cannot suggest how and why the redactor(s), R, made their selection and by what principles they ordered their materials...." (Brettler, 6).

All we really need to keep in mind for the purposes of this course is that the Torah was composed by many different people or groups of people, over several hundred years, long after the events described, and that despite the many authors, the Torah has a surprisingly powerful unity of focus and purpose.

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THE TORAH AS LITERATURE

The Torah, which consists of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible "...most likely completed during the Babylonian exile (586-538 BCE) or soon thereafter in the early Persian period, was ... a very long book, narrating what must have been felt to be the formative period of Israel, from the period of the creation of the world through the death of Moses. The events narrated in Gen. chs 1-11 describing the creation of the world and its population by many nations serve as an introduction to the singling out of

one nation, Israel. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the ancestors of Israel, form the national prehistory. Israel comes into existence as a nation in Exodus, and the foremost events of its national history are the exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Sinai, and the coming to the promised land. These events are central to Exodus-Deuteronomy" (Brettler, 6).

In literature, we look for a protagonist (the hero), agonists (those who resist the hero), and struggle. When we consider the Torah as literature, the central struggle is rooted in the constant tension between God and His chosen people, the Israelites, who continually learn and fall back and learn and fail. God is unequivocally the hero of the Torah in this sense. He is not only a hero, but a passionate artist, a creator, a lawgiver, a teacher of morality, and a mentor of an entire people over a long period of time. Perhaps the most powerful lesson in the Torah from this point of view is that when the Israelites do not obey God, very bad things will happen to them, such as the killing of Aaron's sons, the destruction of the Temple and the exile to Babylon. However, when the Israelites do obey God, He protects them and they thrive (although there can be a long time-lag, as in the years as slaves in Egypt before the Exodus), and ultimately they will gain nationhood in the land promised by God--Canaan.

There are heroic figures in the Torah, such as Moses and Joshua, but they are heroes because God selects them as heroes, they only succeed when they follow the will of God, and their success is brought about by the power of God, not by their innate abilities. These at times reluctant heroes are quite different from the eager heroism of Homeric heroes such as Achilles who leap into conflict seeking personal glory. The Israelites invade and capture Canaan because God gave it to them. This is remarkably different from the Greeks invading and destroying Troy because of a fight over a woman (Helen) and the property rights that came with her. The Greeks do have some of the gods on their side (and the Trojans have some on their side), but Homeric Troy is not really destined to fall. It falls because the Greeks and the gods on their side are ultimately more powerful than the Trojans and the gods on their side. Human morality is not an essential issue.

So, as you read sections of the Torah for this course, try to focus on what happens, who does what to whom, what are the consequences, etc. Try to NOT think about the interpretations you have learned in religious school. The challenge here is to treat the Torah as literature and it is not an easy challenge given the immense amount of interpretation it has undergone in the past millennia.

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WHY IT IS HARD TO READ/WRITE ABOUT ADAM AND EVE

The Torah is a document prepared over centuries by the Hebrew people, and they have been continuously studying and explicating it ever since. For the past two thousand years, the Torah has also been part of the Christian Bible and Christian scholars have been continuously studying and reinterpreting it according to their own religious insights.

Nahum Sarna, writing from a Jewish perspective, explains the sin of Adam and Eve in these terms: "The conversation between the serpent and the woman shows that the most seductive attractions that the creature could offer was the potentiality of the forbidden fruit to make humans like God....Now the imitation of God is indeed a biblical ideal. Man was fashioned in the divine image and "to walk in God's ways" is a recurring admonition of the biblical writings. But true godliness is an expression of character, an attempt to imitate in human relationships those ethical attributes the Scriptures associate with God. The deceptive nature of the serpent's appeal lay in its interpretation of godliness which it equated with defiance of God's will, with power, rather than with strength of character.

"Yet God Himself testifies that "man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (3:22). In other words, man does possess the possibility of defying the divine word, and therein lies the secret of his freedom. The Garden of Eden incident is thus a landmark in the development of the understanding of the nature of man, his predicament and destiny. Man is a free moral agent and this freedom magnifies immeasurably his responsibility for his actions. Notice how each of the participants in the sin was individually punished. Freedom and responsibility are burdens so great for man to bear that he is in vital need of discipline.... man is free to disregard the moral law, should he wish to, though he must be prepared to suffer the consequences. In short, we are being told by the Garden of Eden story that evil is a product of human behavior, not a principle inherent in the cosmos. (28) Man's disobedience is the cause of the human predicament. Human freedom can be at one and the same time an omen of disaster and a challenge and opportunity." (26)

According to Elaine Pagels' *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, the modern interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve as the fall of humanity based on sexual sin became church doctrine in the 4th century. She explains that "...the majority of [early] Christians ... rejected the claim made by radical Christians that the sin of Adam and Even was sexual—that the forbidden "fruit of the tree of knowledge" conveyed, above all, *carnal* knowledge. On the contrary, said Clement of Alexandria (c. 180 C.E.), conscious participation in procreation is "cooperation with God in the work of creation." Adam's sin was not sexual indulgence but disobedience; thus Clement agreed with most of his Jewish and Christian contemporaries that the real theme of the story of Adam and Eve is moral freedom and moral responsibility. Its point is to show that we are responsible for the choices we freely make—god or evil—just as Adam was." (xxiii)

She goes on to explain that "...for nearly the first four hundred years of our era, Christians regarded *freedom* as the primary message of Genesis 1-3—freedom in its many forms, including free will, freedom from demonic powers, freedom from social and sexual obligations, freedom from tyrannical government and from fate; and self-mastery as the source of such freedom. With Augustine...this message changed" (xxv).

"In a world in which Christians not only were free to follow their faith but were officially encouraged to do so, Augustine came to read the story of Adam and Eve very differently than had the majority of his Jewish and Christian predecessors. What they had read for centuries as a story of human freedom became, in his hands, a story of human bondage. Most Jews and Christians had agreed that God gave humankind in creation the gift of moral freedom, and that Adam's misuse of it brought death upon his progeny. But Augustine went further: Adam's sin not only caused our mortality but cost us our moral freedom, irreversibly corrupted our experience of sexuality (which Augustine tended to identify with original sin), and made us incapable of genuine political freedom....

"Augustine's theory of original sin ... offered an analysis of human nature that became... the heritage of all subsequent generations of western Christians and the major influence on their psychological and political thinking. Even today, many people, Catholics and Protestants alike, regard the story of Adam and Eve as virtually synonymous with original sin. During Augustine's own lifetime...various Christians objected to his radical theory, and others bitterly contested it; but within the next few generations, Christians who held to the more traditional views of human freedom were themselves condemned as heretics" (xxvi).

Once we compare the Jewish interpretation of the sin of Adam and Eve, as presented by Sarna, with the Christian interpretation of the sin of Adam and Eve developed by Augustine, it becomes very clear why it is difficult for anyone living now to write about Adam and Eve as if it were just a story. Millennia of interpretation accompany this rather simple story, and depending on how we were raised and educated religiously, we have been trained to bring very different interpretations to it. Our training was often as young children, so it became part of the story, not a critical add-on that we are aware of.

Nonetheless, this is the challenge of this section of our course: we need to try to read the Torah selections intelligently, but suspending as much as possible everything we think we know about them. Furthermore, this challenge of suspending our preconceptions is actually a valid exercise in reading and writing about many texts, especially those from other times and places.

For example, when students compare the story of Adam and Eve to that of Enkidu and the Harlot in the Sumerian epic, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, they frequently fall into the trap of thinking the Harlot is sinful, a fallen woman who destroys Enkidu's happy life among the animals. However, within the context of ancient Sumerian civilization, the Harlot was NOT sinful. The notion of sex as sin had not yet been really developed. Once that is realized, then the question of whether or not Enkidu really fell from happiness or was elevated to civilization becomes easier to think about.

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