

Religion 162: Introduction to the Bible I--Smith College--Fall 2012

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Course Description

The Hebrew Bible is one of the cornerstones of Western Civilization. Yet many people today have little awareness of its content or of the great role it has played in the development of our culture. Fewer have a critical understanding of the Bible's own development or of the vast critical literature that surrounds this most unusual collection of books. The task of this course will be a modest attempt to improve this situation.

Learning the content of the Hebrew Bible and the historical and cultural context in which it flourished will be the primary goal. While pursuing this goal some efforts will be made to familiarize the student with modern critical methods of biblical scholarship. It is hoped that by the end of the course the student will not only have learned certain details of ancient history but will have begun to appreciate this enigmatic set of documents on a deeper level, and will have the ability to discern some of the ways in which our lives today are shaped by its powerful influence.

Required Books

1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, 4th College edition. This Bible has many useful study tools within it and thus is highly recommended. If you already own a different complete recent translation like the New American Bible, or the New Jewish Publication Society Bible, or you own the HarperCollins Study Bible, or the Catholic Study Bible, these are all acceptable for class use. The Authorized (or King James) version is **not** acceptable because it is not in modern English. It is best to own a Bible that also includes the Apocrypha.

2. *Who Wrote the Bible?* by Richard Elliott Friedman. This book will be abbreviated as **WWB** throughout the syllabus.

3. *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* by John J. Collins. This book will be abbreviated as **IHB**.

4. **Course Packet** available at Paradise Copies.

Optional Books

1) *The Torah: A Beginner's Guide* by Joel S. Kaminsky and Joel N. Lohr (Oneworld: 2011). Many of the points I make concerning material in the first 5 books of the Bible can be found in nice summary form in this book. Also, students can get a sense of how Jews and Christians interpret and make liturgical use of the material in the Torah.

Course Requirements

1) There will be a **Midterm Exam** worth approximately 20% of your course grade tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday October 3rd**.

2 **A, B and C**) You will be asked to write 3 short reaction papers (1-3 pages double-spaced). These will each

be worth approximately 5% of your grade for a total of 15% of your final grade. These assignments will be graded Check, Check+, Check-.

Note: All papers are graded on both form (grammar, proper word usage, spelling, etc.) and content (creativity, incisiveness, organization, etc.) If they are full of mechanical and grammatical errors that will count against you even if they are brilliant in content! If they are perfectly formed but are intellectually shallow you will not receive the highest grade possible. They should be neatly typed, double-spaced, and stapled together in correct page order. You should always proofread them or better yet have a friend proofread them before turning them in. Don't be afraid to use the Writing Center!!!

A. Due on Friday September 28th in class. Write a brief paper describing your intellectual and personal acquaintance with the Bible and the study of Religion more generally. Also tell me about your expectations for the class when you registered for it, and how those expectations may have changed after the first two weeks of the class. Finally, you can let me know how you think the class is going at this early point in the semester and whether you think I am pitching the material and the pace of the class too high, too low, or just about right.

B. Due on Monday October 22nd in class, you will write a reaction paper reflecting on the talk by Prof. Luke Timothy Johnson on Thursday October 18th which you are required to attend.

C. Due on Wednesday November 28th. Thanksgiving Assignment: As you travel over the Thanksgiving holiday I want you to take some of the ideas you have learned in this course and have a discussion and/or argument with a friend or family member. If you like, you can hold a general table discussion during the Thanksgiving meal, although be careful not to start a family feud! In particular I want you to discuss a controversial reading of a biblical text (like Tribble's or Levenson's), a discrepancy between two biblical texts, or a larger critical point, such as the fact that the Pentateuch probably was not written by Moses. Try to pick a conversation partner who you think might find this information interesting, shocking or dead wrong. Then write a short paper (2-3 pages long) telling me what topic or text you discussed, who your conversation partner was (include basic background on this person), what you had anticipated would occur, how the discussion went in actuality, and what, if anything, you learned from doing this exercise. Have a good Thanksgiving!

Emergency Option if you are not going to family for Thanksgiving. You may opt to write a reaction paper on the essay by Brenner in the packet. If you plan to do this you then would need to have chosen to write assignment 4 below on different essay in the packet.

3) Due on Wednesday October 31st in class. You will be required to write one short research paper (approximately 4-5 pages double-spaced) summarizing and critically comparing two medium sized or longer entries (3-5 encyclopedia pages in length) on the same general topic in two of the reference tools listed below. You must draw your entries from the following list of reference books found in the reference room of Neilsen Library (or online through the library portal): *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (BS440 .A54 1992, abbreviated *ABD*), *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (NOT!!! *the New Interpreter's Bible* which goes book by book) (BS440 .N445 2006, abbreviated *NIDB*), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (BL31 .E46 1987, also available online, abbreviated *ER*), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (DS57 .C55 1995, abbreviated *CANE*), *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (DS102.8 .E496, also found online, abbreviated *EJ*), or the first volumes of the new *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (available online through the library, abbreviated *EBR*). It may be on a historical person, place or event, the dating or literary shape of a biblical book or any other topic related to the study of the Hebrew Bible. This includes aspects of ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian religion related to the Hebrew Bible. Make sure to tell me which resource tools you have used somewhere in, or at the end of your paper!!! Should you wish to use quotes please indicate the page number, being quoted in a parenthetical abbreviated reference (e.g., *ABD*, vol. 2, 304). This will be worth

approximately 15% of your grade.

NOTE: Whichever reference tools you choose to use make sure you select an article related to the **Hebrew Bible/Old Testament**. These reference works contain articles on the New Testament and if you use either the *Encyclopedia of Religion* or the *Encyclopedia Judaica* these contain many wide-ranging articles on non-biblical areas too. Inasmuch as this course is on the Hebrew Bible select an entry related to this corpus.

4) **Due on Wednesday November 14th in class.** You will be required to write one summary and critique paper (approximately 3-4 pages double-spaced) from the following limited list of articles in the packet. You may **only** write on articles authored by the following: Tribble, Alter, Auerbach, Levenson, Greenberg, Douglas, Lapsley, or Brenner. Once you have chosen your essay or book chapter, you should first read it through at least twice, looking up all cited verses and technical terms to make sure you understand the material completely. You may consult me if you are unclear about certain points an author makes. **BUT** only write upon an article you feel you fully understand. You will then write a summary of the chosen article's argument in 2-3 pages followed by a one page analysis of (1) the author's style of writing, (2) what you found particularly interesting in this article, (3) the strengths and weaknesses of the article and how it might have been improved or made more understandable, (4) the ways in which the article has aided your fuller understanding of the Hebrew Bible. This will be worth approximately 10% of your grade. The point of this assignment is to prepare you for graduate school or the workplace both of which will ask you to digest and critique ideas presented by others.

ADDITIONAL OPTION: If you wish to write one longer (approximately 8-10 pages double spaced) research paper, or do an extended literary analysis or exegesis paper on a specific biblical text you may do so if you received at least an A- on the midterm. This would function in place of writing assignments 3 and 4 (the short research paper and the summary and critique paper). If you choose this option you must tell me **by Friday October 12th**. Then, after clearing the topic with me in advance, **you must meet with me concerning potential bibliographic sources**. This longer paper is **due on Wednesday November 7th** and would count for approximately 25% of your grade.

5) There will be a **Final Examination** worth approximately 30% of your course grade.

6) **Class Attendance and Participation** will be worth approximately 10% of your course grade. **If you skip more than 3 classes I reserve the right to drop your grade one third of a letter grade for each absence over 3.**

7) In order to do well at any of the above requirements it is imperative that you do all of the readings required for each class. If you are pressed for time before a particular session make sure to do at least the primary readings. (I mean those that are selected from the Bible and/or other ancient Near Eastern documents). But you must eventually complete all the secondary readings in order to do decently on the exams.

Course Outline

September 7th-An Introduction to the Course and to the Bible

We will get acquainted with each other, go over the syllabus and answer any general questions. Then we will turn to the question of Bible vs. Bibles. What is a canon and what constitutes a body of literature as sacred? Who makes the decisions about what is or isn't sacred literature? What language were the original documents written in and how old are the oldest copies? Do we possess the original manuscripts or not? We will explore in very general terms what exactly the Bible is, when was it produced, and what are some of the basic ways in which the Bible can be studied today. If time permits we will also try to go over the basic timeline of important historical dates and figures.

Sept. 10th-The Documentary Hypothesis

An introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis, a theory that attempts to answer the following question: Is the Pentateuch (meaning the first 5 books of the Bible) a single document written by a single author or a composite work written by multiple authors?

Assignments:

- 1) Look at Gen. 12:6; 36:31. What do these verses indicate about the time when they were written?
- 2) Read Genesis 37:12-30. Who intervenes to save Joseph's life, Reuben or Judah? Who acquires Joseph, the Ishmaelites or the Midianites?
- 3) Read Genesis 12:10-20; all of chapter 20; and 26:1-11. Why are there 3 similar stories and what do the differences teach us?
- 4) Read **WWB** pp. 15-88. What is the “Documentary Hypothesis?” What is so controversial about it? In what ways is this theory useful and what are its limitations?
- 5) Read **IHB** pages 1-10.

September 12th-- Creation in Israel and Mesopotamia

We will examine the two distinct creation stories found in Genesis 1:1-2:24 with special attention to the relationship that exists between this literature and other Ancient Near Eastern creation myths.

Assignments:

- 1) Read Genesis 1:1-2:3. Why are the sun and moon created on the 4th day and not on the first as might be expected? What is the background and significance of 1:21? How is the passage structured and what significance might this structure have held for the liturgical life of the people? Who might have written such a piece?
- 2) Read Psalms 82 and 96 and Job 1:6 and 2:6. Do these verses help explain anything in Gen. 1:26?
- 3) Read the *Enuma Elish* (The Babylonian Flood Story) in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 60-72. **Packet** (NOTE: all readings from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* are grouped together near the beginning of the PACKET).
- 4) Read Isaiah 27:1-2; 51:9-10; Psalms. 18:7-15; 29; 74:12-17; 89:1-14, 25. To what do these passages allude? Is there a connection with the *Enuma Elish* ? Read Psalm 93. What are the 3 major themes of this poem? How does the *Enuma Elish* illuminate their relationship?
- 5) Read Gen. 2:4-24. How does it differ from the account in Gen. 1-2:3? Which is more majestic? Which is more human?
- 6) Read Aristophanes' speech from Plato's symposium. **Handout.**
- 7) Read “A Love Story Gone Awry” in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* by Phyllis Tribble (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp. 72-105. **Packet**

NOTE: Class will be canceled on Monday September 17th and on Wednesday 26th due to the Fall Jewish Holidays.

Friday September 14th and 19th --The Corruption of Human Beings

An exploration of several narratives found in the early chapters of Genesis that focus on the theme of the progressive corruption of humankind.

Assignments:

- 1) Genesis 2:25-11:32. What is the point of the Adam and Eve story? What was their sin and was it serious enough to warrant the punishment they received? What common human experiences does the story explain?
- 2) When reading the flood story note any inconsistencies that might provide further evidence for the Documentary Hypothesis. How many of each animal did Noah take into the Ark? How many days did it rain? What is the point of this story and has man improved at the end of it? Has God's opinion of mankind changed significantly? Has God changed the way in which he plans to deal with humanity?
- 3) Read the Babylonian Flood Story (Gilgamesh Tablet 11) in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 93-97. **Packet**. How does it compare to the biblical flood story.
- 4) Compare Leviticus 18 to the cursing of Canaan in Gen. 9:18-28. How are the Canaanites portrayed here? Is this an accurate historical report or might it be a piece of propaganda?
- 5) Read **IHB** 15-27.

Friday September 21st, September 24th, Friday Sept. 28th and October 1st The Ancestral Narratives

A study of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs that will focus on 3 major goals: 1) to understand the importance of the patriarchs within the religion of Ancient Israel; 2) to look at the literary structure of certain units within these narratives; 3) to examine the historical evidence consisting primarily of literary and archaeological data in order to assess the historical reliability of the accounts of the patriarchs given in the book of Genesis.

Assignments:

- 1) Begin reading Genesis 12-50 carefully and complete it sometime over the next couple of classes.
- 2) Read **IHB** pp. 44-54.
- 3) Read "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach (Princeton: Princeton University, 1953), pp. 3-23. **Packet**
- 4) Read "Narration and Knowledge" from Robert Alter's in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books 1981), pp. 155-177. **Packet**.

Wednesday Oct 3rd--Midterm Exam

October 10th and Friday the 12th -Exodus and Sinai

An examination of the narratives that speak about Israel's stay in Egypt, her exodus experience, and the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. We will focus on the interplay between literary, historical, and, mythological images and ideas within the book of Exodus, as well look at some of the laws material found in Exodus.

Assignments:

- 1) Read Exodus 1-24, 32-34.
- 2) Read St. Augustine's *Against Lying* translated by H. Browne in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers edited by Philip Schaff* Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 495-497. **Packet**
- 3) Read The Legend of Sargon in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 119. **Packet**. Compare the Legend of Sargon to the description of Moses' birth given in Exodus 2:1-10?
- 4) Read *Stories from Ancient Canaan* edited and translated by Michael Coogan, pp. 86-89. **Packet** What are the parallels between this legend and Exodus 15? Look at Psalm 114 and Joshua 3-4. What do these texts have to do with each other? What connects them to Ex. 15 and the Canaanite legend of Baal and Yamm? Why has the crossing at the Reed Sea become so significant for Ancient Israel?
- 5) Read **IHB** pp. 55-73.
- 6) Read Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), pp. 127-159; 180-183.
- 7) Read Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," pages 25-41 in *Moshe Greenberg: Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995). **Packet**. What is distinctive about Israelite law according to Greenberg?

October 15th and 17th-The Priestly Materials

An examination of selected texts from Leviticus in order to gain a sense of and a sympathy for the outlook espoused by this book. Leviticus contains many of the most important ideas within biblical theology. Inasmuch as it is also one of the most difficult books for modern readers to understand, special effort will be required to grasp the mindset of this text.

Assignments:

- 1) Read Leviticus chapters 1-11 and 16-26. When reading Leviticus do not get caught up in trying to understand all the details of the sacrificial system. Rather, develop a sense and a feeling for the legislation as a whole.
- 2) Read Psalms 46, 48 and Ezekiel 8-11 and 47:1-12. What is the image of the Temple in these psalms? What do the passages in Ezekiel share with Psalm 46?
- 3) Read "The Abominations of Leviticus," pages 41-57 from *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas. **Packet** What, according to Douglas, is the weakness in the rationalistic explanations of the dietary laws? What alternative does Douglas present in place of these rationalistic explanations? Look at Lev. 11:41-47; 20:25-26; and Deut.14:2. What reason do the passages just cited give for these laws?
- 4) What is the relation between ethics and ritual in Lev. 19? Does the presence of verses 17-18 surprise you? What would be the social consequences if the laws in Lev. 25 surrounding the jubilee year were instituted in our society?
- 5) Read **IHB** 74-82.
- 6) Read **WWB** pp. 161-206.

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October 22nd and 24th --Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History

An attempt to understand the distinctive religious ideas of the book of Deuteronomy. We will focus primarily on the theological and social concerns of this book and will contrast Deuteronomy's ideas to those found in Leviticus and other parts of the Pentateuch.

Assignments:

- 1) Read Deuteronomy 4-18, 20-24, 27-31, and 34. What is the style of this book? Why all the stress on intentions and motives? Compare Deut. 5:12-15 to Ex. 20:8-11. Compare Deut. 12:20-28 to Lev. 17:3-14. Compare Deut. 14:21 to Lev. 17:15. What do these comparisons reveal about the nature of the Pentateuch? Is it of composite or single authorship? How would you describe the platform proposed by Deuteronomy? What are Deuteronomy's attitudes toward kingship and prophecy?
- 2) Read **WWB** pp. 89-135.
- 3) Read 2 Kings 22:1-23:25 and compare it to Deut. 12. What does this suggest about the time and place of Deuteronomy's authorship? Does Josiah carry out any of the commands listed in Deut. 12?
- 4) Read the Treaty between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 203-205.
Packet.
- 5) Read 2 Samuel 7, 1 Kings 2 and 9, Jeremiah 7, and Psalms 89 and 132.
- 6) Read **IHB** 84-95.

October 29th and 31st—The Conquest of the Land and the Period of the Judges

This lecture will survey the various hypotheses surrounding the texts that describe the entrance of the Israelites into the land of Canaan.

Assignments:

- 1) Read Joshua 1-12 and Judges 1-9; 17-21. Although you don't have to know all the geographical details mentioned in these narratives you should familiarize yourself with the general areas involved. Start looking at the maps in the back of your Bible! How do the accounts of the conquest differ in Joshua and Judges? Can they be harmonized? Which is more believable? What does Joshua 9 indicate about the accuracy of the accounts in the other chapters in Joshua? Are the Judges primarily legal figures? If not, what are their functions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the form of government recorded in this period?
- 2) Read **IHB** pp. 95-115.
- 3) Read Chapter 3 of Jacqueline Lapsley's, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: John Knox, 2005), 35-64, 117-124. She is a Smith Alum!!

November 5th and 7th—The Monarchy

A study of the factors that contributed to the rise of the monarchy with special attention to the role that the

king played in relation to the cult, the state, and the phenomenon of prophecy. We will look at the costs and benefits of the monarchy.

Assignments:

- 1) Read 1 Samuel 1-16. Why is the institution of kingship introduced into Israelite culture? Is it viewed positively or negatively? What role does prophecy play in relation to kingship?
- 2) Read **WWB** 136-160.
- 3) Read 2 Samuel 7-20 and 1 Kings 1-3, 11-12. Pay attention to the major characters in this story because you will be held responsible for them. Also try to pay attention to the superb literary technique used in this material. Read 1 Chronicles 20 and compare it to the account in Samuel. What is missing from the account in Chronicles? What are the problems with the united monarchy and why does it fall apart?
- 4) Read **IHB** pp. 116-140.

November 12th and 14th—Prophecy Part 1

A survey of prophecy in ancient Israel with attention to the psychological dynamics of this phenomenon, the socio-political environment in which the prophets of the Hebrew Bible flourished, and the religious ideas that are presented by the biblical prophets.

Assignments:

- 1) Read 1 Kings 13, 17-22 and 2 Kgs. 9. What role does the prophet play in society? How does he relate to the king?
- 2) Read all of Amos. To whom does he direct his message?
- 3) Read all of Hosea. Is his message exactly like Amos'? What are the types of sins that upset Hosea? Are they social or cultic?
- 4) Read **IHB** pp. 141-148 and 153-163.

November 26th and 28th—Prophecy Part 2 (No CLASS on Monday Nov. 19th)

Assignments:

- 1) Read Isaiah 1-10 and 2 Kgs. 16. Is Isaiah's advice realistic? What would you have done if you were in King Ahaz's sandals? Compare Isaiah 7 to Matt. 1:18-25. Also compare Zechariah 9:9 to Matt. 21:1-11, Mk. 11:1-11, Lk. 19:28-38 and John 12:12-16.
- 2) Read Jeremiah 1-20, 26-32, 36, 42-44. How does Jeremiah's view of the Temple and Jerusalem differ from Isaiah's? Is Jeremiah totally happy with his vocation? What does Jeremiah consider to be the mark of a true prophet? Do you think Hananiah considers himself a true prophet?
- 3) Read Ezekiel 1-5, 8-11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 23-24, and 36-39.
- 4) Read Athalya Brenner, "Pornoprophets Revisited: Some Additional Reflections," in *The Prophets*, edited

5) Read all of Jonah. What is the purpose of this story? Is it serious or comical? Why is Jonah so upset with God? What is so difficult about being a prophet in Israel?

6) Read **IHB** pp. 148-152 and 164-196.

December 3rd—Wisdom Literature Part 1

An examination of selected wisdom texts from the Hebrew Bible in order to understand their literary and theological characteristics. Special emphasis will be given to the ways in which this literature differs from other texts we have already encountered and the ways in which these differences create a dynamic tension and thus add a richness to the Hebrew Bible.

Assignments:

1) Read **any five chapters** between Proverbs 10-29. What is the principal concern of this literature? How does this material differ from other types of biblical literature?

2) Read Proverbs 1-3 and 7-9. How do these chapters differ from the other chapters of Proverbs that you read? Compare chapter 8:22-31 to Sirach (an apocryphal book also called Ecclesiasticus) chapter 24, Wisdom of Solomon 7:24-8:1, and John 1:1-5. What connects these passages together? Is there an evolution in the concept of Wisdom?

3) Read **IHB** pp. 248-255

December 5th and 10th—Wisdom Literature Part 2, Skeptical Trends

Assignments:

1) Read Job 1-11, 14, 21-22, 27-42. In what manner is the character of Job different in the prologue (1-2) than it is in the dialogues (3-10)? Is the Job in 27-28 more like the one in 1-2 or like the one in 3-10? What might this tell you about the editing of this book? What metaphor is used to describe the human search for wisdom in chapter 28? What is the theological issue in Job? Do you find his or his friends' arguments more persuasive? Are Elihu's arguments (32-37) any more convincing? Does God's answer to Job satisfy your sense of justice?

2) Read the excerpt from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky, pp. 284-296. **Packet**

3) Read **IHB** pp. 256-262.

4) Read Qohelet (Ecclesiastes). [Do not confuse Ecclesiastes with the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus] Who does the book claim is its author? Does this book appeal to your modern sensibilities? How does this book differ from most of the Hebrew Bible? Does Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 agree with the general spirit of the book?

5) Read chapters 1 and 3-6 of the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus (also called Sirach). Is this book closer to the more standard wisdom literature than the book of Qohelet? If so why didn't this book end up in the canon while Ecclesiastes did?

Read **IHB** 262-67.

December 12th--Israel's return from exile, take questions about the Final Exam

A brief survey of some of the texts that were produced during this period in order to understand a few of the strategies which were developed to cope with the problems of the Exile and the Second Temple period.

Assignments:

1) Read Isaiah 40-54, 56, Ruth, and Ezra 9. Do you think it is likely that the prophet Isaiah wrote these chapters? If not, from what time and place might they come? How do these chapters combine myth and history? Do they draw on any themes used previously in the Bible? How do Isaiah 44 and 46 portray the differences between YHWH and other gods? Does this seem like an accurate presentation of icon use in Babylonian religion?

2) Read **IHB** 198-204 and 268-71.

3) Look over notes you took since the midterm to clarify any questions you may have on the materials you will be tested on for the final exam.

Timeline of Important Dates in the Biblical Period

1800 B.C.E. = Abraham

1280 B.C.E. = The Exodus from Egypt

1240 B.C.E. = The Conquest of Canaan

1020 B.C.E. = King Saul, Israel's first monarch.

1000 B.C.E. = King David

960 B.C.E. = King Solomon, the one who built the Jerusalem Temple.

922 B.C.E. = The United Kingdom split into the North (Israel or Ephraim) and the South (Judah).

722 B.C.E. = The Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell when it was conquered by Assyria.

587 B.C.E. = The Southern Kingdom (Judah) fell when it was conquered by Babylonia.

538 B.C.E. = The Edict of Cyrus allowed the first exiles to return and rebuild the temple. This was the beginning of the 2nd temple period.

333 B.C.E. = Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire and took all its holdings including what was once the territory of biblical Israel.

323 B.C.E. = Alexander the Great died and several generals fought over his kingdom. Two major victors emerged. Ptolemy ruled over Egypt, North Africa, and sometimes Palestine. Seleucus ruled over Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, and sometimes Palestine.

165 B.C.E. = The Maccabees

63 B.C.E. = Pompey, a Roman general, took Jerusalem.

2-6? B.C.E. = Jesus was born

70 C.E. = The Second Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans.

200 C.E. = The Mishnah was compiled by Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince)