

## Introduction to Biblical Israel

September 6, 2006

- Course housekeeping matters
- What is Biblical Israel?
- History and “Prehistory”

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## Housekeeping

- Sections
  - HIST282H/JWST234H: will meet in 0142 Holzapfel
  - Mr. Phelan will make up the work in the Tuesday sections next week.
  - Quizzes begin **Next Week**
- Electronic Reserves: a quick how-to guide

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## Searching the catalog

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**basic search**    recent searches    basket

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▶ You are here: **Course reserves** - University of Maryland, College P

**Course reserves basic search**

choose type of search    enter word/s to search    tips

      

Examples: johnson, rebecca  
johns?    (enter last name first)

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- Breadcrumb: You are here: [Course reserves](#) - University of Maryland, College Park [library home](#)
- Search results: Course reserves results for Words= ( lapin )
- Records 1 - 10 of 43
- Table with columns: #, Title, Course, Course Name, Instructor, Period
- Row 1: 1, The Origins of the Seder; The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism, HIST282, History of the Jewish People I, Lapin, Hayim, Fall
- Row 2: 2, The Settlement in Canaan; The Period of the Judges, HIST282, History of the Jewish People I, Lapin, Hayim, Fall
- Row 3: 3, Torah, Shame, and "The", HIST371, Jews and Judaism in Antiquity II, Lapin, Spring

Below the table, the text "Password: hist282lap" is displayed.

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## What is Biblical Israel?

- Some terminology
- Geography
- Bible and historians

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## Some terminology

- BCE/BC-CE/AD
  - Before Christ-*Anno Domini* (Year of the Lord)
  - Before Common Era-Common Era
- Jews, Judaism vs. Israel
  - **For the purposes of this course:** Israel-Biblical Period, Jews-later
  - Reasons to be discussed later
- Bible
  - A collection of books spanning several centuries
  - Literature **of** Israel, sacred **to** Jews

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## Geography

- Canaan/Israel
- Mesopotamia
- "The Fertile Crescent"

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Canaan/  
Israel



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Mesopotamia & "The Fertile Crescent"



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## Bible and historians

- For traditional Jews, Christians: Bible is authoritative **history**
- For historians bible is a historical **artifact**
  - Contains historical (historicizing) myth
  - To be evaluated against other artifacts and data
- Two brief examples
  - Merneptah stele
  - Israelite Entry into Canaan

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## Merneptah stele

- First reference to Israel outside the Bible (1207 BCE)
- “Israel is vanquished and his seed is naught”
- In this case another document “confirms” the Bible, while giving a less plausible scenario than the Bible



The Merneptah Stele is an ancient Egyptian stone tablet covered in hieroglyphs. At the top, there is a relief depicting the pharaoh Merneptah and his family. The hieroglyphs below describe his military campaigns and victories over various Canaanite and Syrian states, including a reference to 'Israel' as a defeated people.

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## Israelite Entry into Canaan

- Most scholars agree that by ca 1200 BCE there was an “Israel” in Canaan (Merneptah Stele). Where did they come from?
- Bible gives one (or more) accounts
- Archaeology undermines some specific details (e.g. walls of Jericho), while suggesting some plausible models for explaining the Israelite presence
- **More on this next time in lecture and in two weeks in section**

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## History and “Prehistory”

- **For our purposes:** History begins with 1200 BCE, when there is a population called “Israel”
- The story of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), the descent into Egypt, and the exodus are part of the prehistory
- Prehistory (especially exodus) essential aspect of biblical and later Jewish self-identity (“I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt”; “You shall love the resident alien, for you were resident aliens in Egypt”)
- We begin our narrative next time with the emergence of an Israelite polity in Canaan.

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