**Between Bible and Talmud, and Biblical Archaeology**

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Born in New York City, Debbie settled in Israel in 1972. Her Ph.D. is from the Hebrew University on the social history of Jewish women's education. She is one of the founding members of Kehillat Yedidya, an Orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem's Bak'a neighborhood which integrates Halacha (Jewish religious law) with feminism, tolerance and pluralism. Debbie is involved with Jewish religious feminism, interfaith dialogue and the religious peace movement. Immediate Past President of the ICCJ, International Council of Christians and Jews.

1. Introduction.
2. Lived in Jerusalem since 1972 (September 25). She is a “modern orthodox Jew.” Lord Jonathan Sachs used to be the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth. He represents modern orthodox Jewry. He was an advocate of religions in general, and Judaism in particular.
3. We will have six sessions, five at Tantur and one at our synagogue.
4. She distributes a bibliography (her first gift).
5. Immediate Past President of the International Council of Christians and Jews.
6. Go to [www.iccj.org](http://www.iccj.org), click on “Berlin Document” (second gift). It’s the first time that Jews and Christians have been self-critical in the presence of the other.
7. “As Long as You Believe in a Living God, You Must Have Hope.doc” (2013), the words of the Lutheran Palestinian Bishop. Access this document, which defines “Holy Land” and “Zionism” and encourages dialogue.
8. Topic: “Between the Bible and the Talmud.”
9. Christians and Jews share much in common. They are the only two religious groups who share common Scripture (and common liturgy). The synagogue and the church us the Psalms. But today we’ll focus on the differences.
10. The Torah. It means the Five Books of Moses. Every synagogue has a holy ark that faces Jerusalem and that contains scrolls. Literally, “Torah” means, not “law,” but “teaching” or “instruction.” It is the first part of the Hebrew Bible or TaNaKh. It is an acronym, a word made up of initials (like NATO –not CIA).
11. Torah.
12. Nebi’im. Prophets.
13. Kethubim. Writings.
14. The Initial Story. One day, God was looking at what Jews were doing. Jews are human beings who make mistakes. God sees that some Jews are lying, cheating, and stealing. He said, “You are not living by the Torah, so I’m going to take it back.” All over the world, the Torah scrolls go back to heaven. (By the way, the TaNaKh is an intertestamental commentary on the Bible. Esther has to do with Joseph, Song of Songs has to do with Eden. The commentaries disappear, including the Mishnah (which is commentary) and the Talmud, which is a commentary on the Mishnah, and all of the Midrash.) Then the commentaries disappear as well. And philosophies of Judaism. And the mystical commentary on the Zohar, which formed the basis of the Kabbalah. Heaven was overflowing. God said, “Take back the Torah, you’ve earned the right to keep it.”
15. Discussion.
16. Centuries of writing and thinking about the Torah have “paid” for it. It has made it ours.
17. It is a struggle. The Torah is the cornerstone of traditional Jewish learning, and also the cornerstone of modern Israeli secular culture. Debbie’s nephew, a secular Israeli, is a “fringe” theater-writer, avant-garde, experimental, who won an award.
18. The Torah is now open to women. It is a recent phenomenon. Feminist, scientific, ecological, inter-religious insights.
19. People who embrace may be hugging or wrestling.
20. Our relationship with texts is a relationship of hugging and wrestling.
21. We study the texts to discover what God wants of us.
22. We hug and we wrestle.
23. The 929 Project.
24. There are 929 chapters in the TaNaKh. We should read it in 3.5 years. There is a Friday afternoon TV program. There are thousands of people who participate in the 929 project.
25. At Debbie’s synagogue, the group is out of Torah and into the Nebiim, because they are reading Joshua.
26. Contents of the TaNaKh.
27. Overview.
28. Torah.
29. Nebiim.
30. Early Prophets. Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings.
31. Later Prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve.
32. Kethubim.
33. Wisdom. Psalms, Proverbs, Job.
34. Five Scrolls. Song of Songs, Ruth [read on Shavuot or Pentecost], Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther.
35. Historiography. Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, 1-2 Chronicles.
36. Differences between Jewish and Christian Bibles.
37. Some books are not included, the Deuterocanonical Works. Baruch, Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, 1-2 Maccabees.
38. Some books have a different order.
39. Esther does not, in TaNaKh, have the prayer that Esther prayed.
40. The order of the books is different.
41. The Book of Ruth, in the TaNaKh, is in the five scrolls. In the Christian bible, Ruth is between Judges and 1 Samuel. In Hebrew tradition, Samuel wrote Ruth.
42. The Book of Ezra begins, in our Bible, at the end of 2 Chronicles with the words, “Let him go up” (Vaya’al). El Al means “towards the skies,” an echo of Vaya’al. Also the word Aliyah (to go up) also means a “spiritual ascent,” a “going up” to Israel. Debbie made an “aliyah” in 1972, when she went up to Israel.
43. Malachi ends with the promise of Elijah the prophet. He is the forerunner or harbinger of the messiah, just as John the Baptist. The TaNaKh means that Israel was sent into exile, but there was a promise of return. For Christians, the promise is the Gospel or good news.
44. Christians and Jews read the Bible differently.
45. Christians view the NT as the fulfillment of the OT.
46. Some Jews view the NT as a commentary on the TaNaKh. See Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford, 2011). Forty or fifty Jewish scholars have written commentaries on the NT.
47. The Babylonian Talmud, a Commentary on the Mishnah.
48. Introduction.
49. There are commentaries from different generations among Jewish scholars. It is a forerunner of the Hypertext Markup Language.
50. English. See *The Treatise Ta’anit of the Babylonian Talmud*, Critically edited and provided with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Maler.
51. The Yeshiva. In South Tel Aviv, there are people who “sit” and study, and then do social work.
52. Midrash. What is it? Consider Genesis 4.
53. The Reading.
* “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’ And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.
* “In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering but Cain and his offering he had no regard.
* “So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; *its desire is for you, but you must master it*.
* Cain said to Abel his brother, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against brother Abel, and killed him.” [“And Cain said to his brother Abel, *and it happened when they were in the field*, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”]
1. Commentary.
2. The struggle between shepherds and farmers.
3. The struggle between two sons, sibling rivalry. Birth order is an issue.
4. One was conceived with the help of the Lord – Cain – and the other doesn’t mention it. Cain is *Kinyan*, property, something of lasting value. He lasts, Abel doesn’t. Abel is *hebel*, something that comes out of your mouth. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” – so Abel is evanescent.
5. Cain’s offering of agricultural produce; Abel brought his best animal. Cain is the first person to bring an offering to the LORD. Abel is not the first; he brings the firstling to outshine his brother.
6. Cain had direct contact with God. Sin crouches at the door, but you can control it.
7. The translation has inserted quotation marks. *“It happened when they were in the field*,” not “Let us go into the field.”
8. The phrase “his brother Abel” is needlessly repeated. It emphasizes that the first homicide is fratricide. And maybe all homicides are fratricides. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”
9. Approaches of Midrashim.
10. The conflict over property and possessions and ownership. The farmer said that he was more important, because he grew crops. “Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.” Marx.
11. Power, geography or religion. Haram al-sharif or Temple Mount. “The temple will be built where I am standing,” and Abel disagrees. Cain said to Abel his brother, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against brother Abel, and killed him.” Adler.
12. Sex. “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’ And again, she bore his brother Abel.” Freud.
13. The Definition of Midrash.
14. Characterization. A rabbinic method of determining scripture characterized by:
15. It comments on Scripture book by book, chapter by chapter, line by line, and even word by word. *Genesis rabat* comments on Genesis.
16. Midrashim relate to problems within the text. Something missing, unnecessarily repeated, ambiguous, etc. When Abraham goes up the mountain, who are his sons?
17. Midrash asks general questions like, “Why would one brother kill another?” The rabbis who gave them to us, 1500 years ago, had philosophical and theological ideas, and presented them in the form of stories.
18. Legal Midrashim. When the text says, “an eye for an eye,” what it means is “monetary compensation.” This is *halekah*. Not an eye for an eye in the literal sense. It is a sin to take the Bible literally. But if I were an extremist, I would say that the Midrashim go back to Sinai.
19. Mishnah. We could also comment on the Torah thematically. *The largely (but not exclusively) legal commentary on the Torah is the Mishnah*. It is a compilation of rabbinic lore, largely a legal commentary, organized thematically. It was redacted around 200-220 BCE in the land of Israel. The “parting of the ways” between Christians and Jews took hundreds of years.
20. Examples of Mishnah.
21. Example: Leviticus 23:42-43. “You shall *dwell in booths* for seven days; all that are native in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” The booths are not tents. They are already living in tents. They are shelters. Some say “*tabernacles*.”
22. Setting: Moses has come down from the mountain and he says, “You shall live in booths.” What’s a “booth”? What is it made from? Can we make them in the desert, or must we wait until we get to the Promised Land? What size? Will it have a roof?
23. The Mishnah says: two and a half walls. It was like Abraham’s tent, open in different directions.
24. The Talmud (from Babylonia) says: Can you build a booth on the back of a camel? On a ship? Could one of the walls be the back side of an elephant?
25. The Nature of the Commentary. People really wanted to know the meaning.
26. Could you build a booth on top of another booth? Not if it obscures the sky.
27. What does it mean to “live” in the booth? Does it mean that all of our furniture goes into the booth? We live there, entertain there, sleep there.
28. What do we do if it rains? Is there a limit to the time we must spend in the booth if it is pouring rain? Glasgow in October is cold. My Scottish friend would sit in the booth in an overcoat with an electric heater. The Mishnah’s answer: “If it is raining so hard that it will spoil the soup, go inside.”
29. The sukkah symbolizes the impermanence and fragility of life. If it’s too hot, don’t torture yourself.
30. “You shall dwell in booths.” Who is the “you”? It needn’t be Jews. It needn’t be women, but women can enter, as can children.
31. Conclusion. The Mishnah is a thematic commentary on the Torah, largely but not exclusively legal. A whole book of the Mishnah is devoted to Booths. Another is devoted to marital law, marriages and divorces. There are books of the Mishnah devoted to Shabbat, Yom kippur, agricultural laws, etc.
32. *The Talmud. It is a commentary on the Mishnah*, organized, not on the bible, but on the books of the Mishnah. The Talmud was edited (200-500 CE) in two places.
33. Two Types.
34. One is called “Jerusalem Talmud,” even though it is written in Galilee.
35. The other is the “Babylonian Talmud.”
36. Ultra Orthodox are studying the Talmud. We define Torah narrowly as the five books of Moses; but we can also speak of Torah inclusively, embracing Mishnah, Talmud,
37. Mishnah Avot (“Sayings of the Fathers”).
38. Example from Exodus 15:11 (Miriam’s hymn, in which Israel celebrates). “Who is like you among the gods, O LORD?”
39. “Gods” acknowledges that there are many gods among the local people.
40. The word for “gods,” “holy ones,” etc. is *elim*. The rabbis said, “don’t read the word *elim*, but add an extra letter, “elmim,” meaning mute or silent. “Who is like unto you, O LORD, because you remain “silent.” We change the text.
41. We point an accusing finger at God. His people are suffering, and he is silent.
42. Context: They Egyptians have drowned. But they are also God’s creatures, and they are suffering. We are not to rejoice at the downfall of our enemies. Our cup of joy cannot be full when our enemies suffer.
43. There is ample cause today for mourning, but there is also room for hope. Angela Merkel is a sign of hope. Christians are giving us a model of renewal, repentance, and transformation. Jews say, “Just because I’m paranoid doesn’t mean that they’re not out to get me.” But we live in a marketplace of ideas.
44. Christianity and Judaism developed out of a shared biblical tradition.