

The Bible's Many Voices

Study Guide/Syllabus

By Michael Carasik



The Bible's Many Voices

Introduction

"The Bible remains what it has always been: the one thousand-year slice of civilization that has shaped the culture we live in today. As you might expect, one thousand years of writing could not possibly be in a monotone. My obligation (and my joy) as a scholar, my challenge (and my pleasure) as a writer, are to introduce you to as many of the biblical authors as I can within the space of this small book." Michael Carasik

This book is intended for students of the Bible who want to appreciate its literary genres and its linguistic genius.

Professor Michael Carasik, a gifted biblical teacher, introduces us to the majestic coat of many colors that is the Hebrew Bible. What follows is a 24 unit syllabus that surveys the historical, theological, legal, philosophical, and prophetic voices of Scripture. He even gives us a glimpse of women's voices, and voices from the wider world that influences the sacred canon.

The study of the Hebrew Bible in the Jewish community is often confined to the weekly Torah portion. Surely the Bible deserves to be engaged in its full splendor. This book and syllabus offers an intriguing way in. The seeker with the motivation and patience to examine the trees will begin discerning the biblical forest in all its dazzling diversity.

All you need for this journey are a Bible (may we suggest *The JPS TANAKH*), *The Bible's Many Voices*, and this study guide. Whether you are a teacher of the class, a student, or simply an interested reader, we hope that your experience will echo the author's when he writes, "I have spent many happy hours listening to the voices of the biblical writers and of their later interpreters. The purpose of this book is to make them come alive for you as they have for me."

Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz
The Jewish Publication Society

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Syllabus

Class Subject	Book Chapter
Unit 1. Introduction to the Bible	Whose Bible Is It?
Unit 2. The Bible in Translation	The Sound of the Biblical Voices
Unit 3. The Bible in Conversation with Itself	The Sound of the Biblical Voices
Unit 4. The Bible and “History”	Historical Voices
Unit 5. The Deuteronomist and the Chronicler	Historical Voices
Unit 6. The Sources of the Pentateuch	Theological Voices
Unit 7. Immanence and Transcendence	Theological Voices
Unit 8. Deuteronomy and History	Theological Voices
Unit 9. Law and Narrative	Legal Voices
Unit 10. The Ten Commandments	Legal Voices
Unit 11. The Varieties of Biblical Law	Legal Voices
Unit 12. The Slave Laws	Legal Voices
Unit 13. Law Outside the Pentateuch	Legal Voices
Unit 14. The Nature of Biblical Prophecy	Prophetic Voices
Unit 15. Prophecy and Politics	Prophetic Voices
Unit 16. Biblical Perspectives on Women	Women's Voices
Unit 17. Two Books Written by Women	Women's Voices
Unit 18. “Solomon” the Wise	Voices of the Wise
Unit 19. The Book of Job	Voices of the Wise
Unit 20. Wisdom from the Wider World	Foreign Voices
Unit 21. Foreign Cultural Influences	Foreign Voices
Unit 22. The Ten (?) Plagues	Voices of Song and Legend
Unit 23. The Creation Stories	Voices of Song and Legend
Unit 24. The Bible and Its Aftermath	Echoes and Reverberations

The Bible's Many Voices

Unit 1 Introduction to the Bible

Goal: To understand what “the Bible” really is and how the meaning of the Bible and even its contents differs depending on whose Bible you open.

Readings

Many Voices: Read Me First (pp. xi–xiii)

Many Voices: “Whose Bible is It?” (pp. 1–21)

Many Voices: Jewish and Christian Biblical Order (pp. 351–352)

Questions for Discussion

- What is the difference between the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Bibles?
- What do the different arrangements of Jewish and Christian Bibles say about their content?
- How does contemporary culture shape our response to the Bible?
- Is treating the Bible as a human book compatible with religious belief?

Unit 2 The Bible in Translation

Goal: To understand how the Bible translation you use shapes what you read.

Readings

Many Voices: “The Sound of the Biblical Voices” (pp. 23–35).

Genesis 1

Other Biblical Texts Discussed: Proverbs, Esther, Jeremiah

Questions for Discussion

What do we gain and what do we lose by reading the Bible in translation?

There were variant Hebrew texts in antiquity. So which Bible is “the original”?

When, and why, did further changes in biblical texts become impossible?

Unit 3 The Bible in Conversation with Itself

Goal: To begin hearing the Bible not as a monologue but as a conversation, and to understand the many different ways in which biblical texts are an interplay of voices.

Readings

Many Voices: “The Sound of the Biblical Voices” (pp. 35–61).

Psalm 148

Exodus 6:2–3

Psalms 100:3, Proverbs 23:26, Job 13:15
Judges 12:5–6, 1 Samuel 9:12–13
Deuteronomy 2
2 Samuel 16:16, Proverbs 26:4–5, Jeremiah 26, Psalm 8:4–5, Ecclesiastes 3:19–20
Jeremiah 31:33–34, Ezekiel 11:19–20
2 Kings 24, 2 Kings 17, Jeremiah 44, Ezra 5:11–13, Isaiah 45:1–4

Questions for Discussion

How are we to reconcile contradictions that are found in the Bible itself?
What do we gain by complicating our understanding of the Bible?
Are some biblical voices more “legitimate” than others?

Unit 4 The Bible and “History”

Goal: To understand difference between “Bible stories” and biblical history.

Readings

Many Voices: “Historical Voices” (pp. 62–86)
1 Samuel 17; 1 Samuel 21:9–10 and 25:29; 2 Samuel 21:19 and 1 Chronicles 20:5
1 Chronicles 11 and 2 Samuel 23
1 Kings 5:17–19 and 1 Chronicles 22:7–10; 1 Kings 6:1 and 2 Chronicles 3:1–2
1 Kings 10–11 and 2 Chronicles 9

Questions for Discussion

Who killed Goliath? Why did it matter to the various biblical writers? Why does it matter now?
How do the views of David and Solomon in Chronicles differ from those in Samuel and Kings?
What should we think about David and Solomon as actual historical personalities?
How should this affect what contemporary Jews and Christians think about them?

Unit 5 The Deuteronomist and the Chronicler

Goal: To understand the ideological background behind the Bible’s historical texts.

Readings

Many Voices: “Historical Voices” (pp. 86–97)
Deuteronomy 17:14–20
2 Chronicles 30 and 2 Kings 23
Judges 2:11–23

Questions for Discussion

What was the Deuteronomic view of history, and what prompted it?
How was this different by the time of the Chronicler, and why might it have changed?

Unit 6 The Sources of the Pentateuch

Goal: To understand what led scholars of the Bible to believe that the Pentateuch developed from earlier, written sources.

Readings

Many Voices: “Theological Voices” (pp. 98–110)

1 Samuel 15:24–31

Genesis 6:9–9:19

Questions for Discussion

What are the differences between the two voices that tell the Flood story?

What underlies these differences?

Why might such differences remain when two earlier versions of the story were combined?

What other possible ways might one explain the differences?

Unit 7 Immanence and Transcendence

Goal: To recognize the voices that proclaim God’s immanence (the “Presence” theology) and transcendence (the “name” theology).

Readings

Many Voices: “Theological Voices” (pp. 110–124)

Ezekiel 1:27–28

Exodus 24:16–17

Exodus 34:27–35

Exodus 40:33–38

Exodus 6:2–3 and 3:15

Judges 13:17–18 and Genesis 32:27–30

Deuteronomy 12:4–5 and 1 Kings 5:19

1 Kings 8

Questions for Discussion

How does the Bible describe God’s Presence, and what is the nature of that Presence?

Why does Deuteronomy use God’s name to symbolize God?

What is the purpose of having a Temple, according to each of these perspectives?

Unit 8 Deuteronomy and History

Goal: To recognize the connection between the Deuteronomic perspective and the book of Kings and to begin to think about the social and historical sources of the theological voices.

Readings

Many Voices: “Theological Voices” (pp. 124–132)

1 Kings 15:1–3

2 Kings 23:25 and Deuteronomy 6:5

1 Kings 8:46–49

Questions for Discussion

Why and how might historical events prompt a particular theological outlook?

What other causes might be responsible for biblical texts with particular ideas?

What are some good arguments for and against the centralization of worship?

Unit 9 Law and Narrative

Goal: To recognize that the Pentateuch presents laws and lawgiving not independently but as part of a story.

Readings

Many Voices: “Legal Voices” (pp. 133–141)

Numbers 15:32–36

Numbers 27:1–11 and 36:1–13

Exodus 16

Questions for Discussion

What makes the first five books of the Bible a unit?

What different kinds of laws are given as part of the biblical story?

What are the implications of laws given in this way?

Unit 10 The Ten Commandments

Goal: To understand the complications behind our use of the phrase “the Ten Commandments.”

Readings

Many Voices: “Legal Voices” (pp. 141–148)

Exodus 20

Deuteronomy 5

Exodus 34

Questions for Discussion

What are the differences between the Exodus 20 version and Moses' repetition of it?

What might explain the differences?

Where does the name "the Ten Commandments" come from?

Why are there "Ten" commandments as opposed to some other number?

How would you divide each set into 10?

Unit 11 The Varieties of Biblical Law

Goal: To understand the range of different sources in the Pentateuch that present the various laws.

Readings

Many Voices: "Legal Voices" (pp. 148–153)

Exodus 21–23

selected texts from:

Leviticus 1, 13, 19

Numbers 5, 6, 19

Deuteronomy 12, 15, 21

Questions for Discussion

What different kinds of law are presented in the Pentateuch?

What different literary genres are used to present law?

Which laws were specific to their own time and which were meant to be applicable today?

Unit 12 The Slave Laws

Goal: To compare and contrast the slave laws of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus.

Readings

Many Voices: "Legal Voices" (pp. 153–162)

Exodus 21:2–6

Deuteronomy 15:12–18

Leviticus 25:39–46

Questions for Discussion

How do these three laws differ?

What is the relationship between the three?

What role do the slave laws play in their legal groupings and in the larger story?

Unit 13 Law Outside the Pentateuch

Goal: To understand the role law plays in the Bible as a whole.

Readings

Many Voices: “Legal Voices” (pp. 162–173)
Genesis 38:8–9, Deuteronomy 25:5–6, Ruth 4:1–10
Jeremiah 34:8–22

Questions for Discussion

What are the different words used for “law” in the Bible? What are their implications?
Were the laws found in the Pentateuch used in the same way as laws in our contemporary world?
What role does law play in the Bible outside the Pentateuch?

Unit 14 The Nature of Biblical Prophecy

Goal: To understand what prophecy meant in the world of the Bible.

Readings

Many Voices: “Prophetic Voices” (pp. 174–189)
Jonah 3
1 Samuel 10:9–13, 19:18–24
2 Kings 13:14–19
1 Kings 22

Questions for Discussion

What was it like to hear a prophet? To be one?
What was the prophet’s job, and how did prophets do it?
How can you tell whether or not someone is a “true” prophet?

Unit 15 Prophecy and Politics

Goal: To understand the political role of prophecy.

Readings

Many Voices: “Prophetic Voices” (pp. 189–207)
1 Kings 21:17–19
2 Kings 22
Isaiah 45:1–7
Ezekiel 26
Jeremiah 26–28

Jeremiah 16:18 and Isaiah 40:1–2

Questions for Discussion

What kinds of political roles did the prophets play?

Unit 16 Biblical Perspectives on Women

Goal: To examine biblical attitudes toward women and the various roles that women play in the Bible.

Readings

Many Voices: “Women’s Voices” (pp. 208–222, 231–237)

2 Kings 4:8–37

Numbers 30

1 Samuel 18:6–9

Judges 5

2 Samuel 14:1–20, 20:1–22

Judges 11

Questions for Discussion

What kinds of roles could women play in ancient Israel?

Which roles were specific to women?

What does biblical language reveal about social attitudes toward gender?

Unit 17 Two Books Written by Women

Goal: To become familiar with the two biblical books that can plausibly be understood as having been written by women.

Readings

Many Voices: “Women’s Voices” (pp. 222–231)

Ruth

Song of Songs

Questions for Discussion

How does the language, plot, and perspective of Ruth differ from other biblical stories?

How does the Song of Songs’ attitude toward sexuality differ from that elsewhere in the Bible?

What is the relationship between each of these books and the rest of the Bible?

Unit 18 “Solomon” the Wise

Goal: To understand the role human wisdom plays in the Bible, and to become familiar with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Readings

Many Voices: “Voices of the Wise” (pp. 238–261)

1 Kings 3 and 10

1 Kings 5:10–12

Proverbs 1:1–7

Proverbs 22

Proverbs 31:10–31

Ecclesiastes 1 and 3

Ecclesiastes 11:9 and Numbers 15:37–39

Ecclesiastes 12

Questions for Discussion

In what sense are the proverbs in Proverbs “proverbs of Solomon”?

What is the difference between a sentence-proverb and an instruction?

Why would a sage use one form or the other?

Why is Qohelet called “son of David, king in Jerusalem”?

Why does Qohelet describe everything as *hevel*? What does he mean by that word?

How does the voice at the end of Ecclesiastes change our understanding of the book?

Unit 19 The Book of Job

Goal: To begin the study of the book of Job.

Readings

Many Voices: “Voices of the Wise” (pp. 261–274)

Ezekiel 14:12–14

Genesis 22:1–19

Job 1–3, 28, 40–42

Questions for Discussion

Why does God test Job?

Who is “the Prosecutor”?

How does Job react to his sufferings? How do his friends react?

What is the meaning of God’s response?

Which of the characters in the book are acting wisely?

Unit 20 Wisdom from the Wider World

Goal: To encounter the foreign sources of wisdom in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Readings

Many Voices: “Foreign Voices” (pp. 275–286)

Ecclesiastes 9:7–9 with Gilgamesh passage

Proverbs 22:17–21 with excerpt from the Instruction of Amenemope

Questions for Discussion

What made it possible—and appropriate—for wisdom literature to draw on foreign sources?

How did Israelite authors encounter this foreign material?

Unit 21 Foreign Cultural Influences on Biblical Israel

Goal: To learn about the cultures that surrounded biblical Israel and how they influenced the text of our Bibles.

Readings

Many Voices: “Foreign Voices” (pp. 286–300)

Exodus 21:28–32, 35–36 with parallels from the Code of Hammurabi and the Laws of Eshnunna

Psalms 104

Ezekiel 28

Questions for Discussion

Why would biblical laws bear such close resemblance to foreign laws?

What other aspects of foreign culture might have been adopted by the Israelites?

Which aspects of foreign culture would have been alien to them?

Unit 22 The Ten (?) Plagues

Goal: To examine the different biblical versions of the Egyptian plagues, and to begin to think about the purpose of the biblical stories.

Readings

Many Voices: “Voices of Song and Legend” (pp. 301–312)

Exodus 7:14–11:10

Psalms 78:40–55

Psalms 105

Questions for Discussion

How many plagues were there?

What role do the plagues play in the story of the exodus as told in the book of Exodus?

What role do they play in the psalms?

Are the stories in the Bible myth, history, or something in between?

Unit 23 The Creation Stories

Goal: To look more closely at the many different ways the Bible describes creation.

Readings

Many Voices: “Voices of Song and Legend” (pp. 312–328)

Isaiah 45:9–18 and 40:12–26

Proverbs 8:22–31

Psalms 104:1–9

Job 38

Isaiah 51:9–11

Exodus 15:1–18

Psalms 114

Questions for Discussion

How do the different biblical voices describe creation?

What accounts for these differences?

What is the relationship between creation and the exodus?

Unit 24 The Bible and Its Aftermath

Goal: To sample the vast range of later works that have responded to the Bible.

Readings

Many Voices: “Echoes and Reverberations” (pp. 329–350)

Genesis 12:10–16 with excerpt from the Genesis Apocryphon

Isaiah 6:9–10 with Matt 13:10–17

Isaiah 40:3–5 with Mark 1:3, Matthew 3:3, Luke 3:4–6

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Questions for Discussion

What are some of the ways in which later writers responded to the Bible?

Are all—or any—of these responses legitimate? How would the biblical writers react to them?

How has your own relationship with the Bible changed after taking this course?