

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 17, Introduction to Rabbinic Literature Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 17, Introduction to Rabbinic Literature, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Elaine Phillips introduces Rabbinic literature, exploring its historical development from the Babylonian exile to the compilation of the Mishnah in the 3rd century CE. The lecture examines key concepts like the dual Torah (written and oral), the roles of the Tannaim and the Sanhedrin, and the significant texts including the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud. Different genres within Rabbinic literature are discussed—Midrash (interpretation of scripture), Halakha (religious law), and Agadah (narrative)—along with their methods of biblical interpretation and application to daily life. Finally, the lecture provides examples of both Halachic and Agadic Midrash, showcasing how Rabbinic scholars engaged with and interpreted scripture to address questions of law, ethics, and the ongoing relationship between the Jewish people and God.

2. 36 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 17 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Introduction to Biblical Studies).



**Phillips_IBS_Session
17.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Phillips_IBS_EN_Session17.pdf":

Briefing Document: Introduction to Rabbinic Literature

Purpose: To provide an overview of rabbinic literature, its historical context, literary genres, and significance, especially in relation to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

I. Introduction to Rabbinic Literature

- **Definition:** Rabbinic literature encompasses texts produced by the successors of the Pharisees, spanning centuries and responding to the Hebrew Bible. It's a vast body of work, offering a rich resource for understanding Jewish thought and practice.
- Quote: "The rabbinic literature is going to be, in a nutshell, all of those texts coming from the successors to what we might think of as Pharisees, who, over the centuries, are responding back to the Hebrew Bible."
- **Mishnah as Ideal:** The Mishnah, a core component of rabbinic literature, presents an idealized view of temple practices and Jewish life, reflecting the ideal as presented in Torah. Although compiled in the 3rd century AD, it represents the temple as if it still existed.
- Quote: "One of the things that we need to say about the Mishnah is that it, in a sense, was representing the folks who are involved in the discussion, the audiences of it, if you will, representing the ideal that was in Torah."
- **Significance of Mishnah Yomah:** The Mishnah section *Yomah* (Day of Atonement) is valuable for understanding potential 1st-century temple procedures during Jesus' time.
- **Methodological Lenses:** The material will be approached through historical and literary lenses to understand the development of rabbinic thought and its diverse genres.

II. Connections to the New Testament

- **Authoritative Tradition:** Paul's emphasis on "receiving" and "passing on" tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 aligns with the rabbinic principle of transmitting authoritative teaching. This can be seen with the Hebrew verbs "kibble" and "I'm a star."
- Quote: "So, when Paul's doing that, he's actually articulating a principle of receiving authoritative tradition and then handing it on."
- **Jesus' Authority:** In contrast to rabbinic tradition, Jesus taught with his own authority, not relying on established figures.
- Quote: "He's not depending on somebody else's authority that he's receiving and handing on to them. He's speaking with his own authority."
- **Sabbath Debates:** The New Testament debates regarding the Sabbath (e.g., Mark 2, Matthew 12) find resonance in rabbinic discussions on what is lawful.
- **Shema and Evening Recitation:** The Mishnah's opening discussion about when to recite the Shema (the Jewish creed) in the evening demonstrates the importance of this foundational text.
- Quote: "The very first statement in the entirety of this Mishnaic and then Talmudic corpus is, from when can we recite that as we recite in the evening?"

III. Historical Backdrop

- **Exile and Diaspora:** The Babylonian exile led to the development of the synagogue as a communal gathering place. The return from exile resulted in a diaspora of Jews who remained outside Judea.
- **Second Temple:** The Second Temple, completed in 516 BCE, was later expanded by Herod the Great and stood until its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.
- **Hellenistic Influence:** Hellenistic (Greco-Roman) thought presented a challenge to traditional Judaism, leading to diverse approaches within the Jewish community.
- **Roman Occupation:** Roman occupation, marked by several Jewish revolts, shaped Jewish life and influenced the development of rabbinic literature.
- **Dual Torah:** The concept of a "dual Torah" emerged: the written Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and the oral Torah passed down through generations and later written down as a means of continuation. The oral Torah was considered equally authoritative by rabbinic Judaism.

- Quote: "According to rabbinic Judaism, the oral Torah is as important and as authoritative as it was handed along as the written Torah that we know in the first five books of Moses."
- **Avot (Sayings of the Fathers):** A section of the Mishnah, *Avot*, traces the transmission of the dual Torah from Moses to various leaders, highlighting the chain of tradition.
- Quote: "Avot will serve as the linkage for understanding how Torah, revealed to Moses at Sinai, gets to the point where all these guys are discussing this stuff."
- **Key Figures:** Key figures like Hillel and Shammai (preceding Jesus) were involved in debates that are reflected in the New Testament (e.g., divorce). The Pharisees are seen as the fertile ground for the later rabbinic movement.
- **Sanhedrin:** The Sanhedrin, a Jewish legal body, played a crucial role. There were various sizes of Sanhedrins, with the Great Sanhedrin being comprised of 71 members, and those of 23 being able to deal with death penalty cases.
- **Yavne (Jamnia):** After the destruction of the temple, Jewish leadership reconvened in Yavne. Yochanan ben Zakkai is highlighted as a key figure in rethinking Judaism without the temple. The focus shifted to deeds of love and kindness, Torah study, and prayer.
- **Tannaim:** These were pairs of scholars who would accurately repeat tradition. This continued until the Mishnah was written down in the early third century CE.
- **Bar Kokhba Revolt:** The second Jewish revolt led to the martyrdom of significant teachers, after which the center of Judaism moved to Galilee.
- **Judah the Prince (Rabbi):** Judah the Prince compiled the Mishnah around 220 CE, and it is important to note that at this point he was getting along with the Romans.

IV. Literary Genres

- **Midrash:** The broad term midrash signifies the exploration and interpretation of biblical texts, examining unusual lexical or grammar items.
- **Halakha:** Halakha deals with religious obligations and how to conduct oneself in all areas of life. It's about shaping one's life according to religious principles.
- **Agadah:** Agadah involves the telling of stories, often retelling biblical narratives with imagination.

- **Halakhic Midrash:** Midrash that explores the meaning of the biblical text in a way that establishes a guide for conduct.
- **Agadic Midrash:** Midrash that takes biblical narratives and expands upon them.

V. Rabbinic Texts

- **Mishnah:** A compilation of halakhic teachings, organized into six orders based on daily life:
 1. *Seeds* (agriculture and blessings)
 2. *Festivals* (Sabbath and appointed times)
 3. *Women* (marriage, family)
 4. *Damages* (legal and civil matters, including Sanhedrin)
 5. *Holy Things* (temple and sacrifices)
 6. *Purities* (ritual purity)
- Mishnah primarily deals with how to conduct yourself. There is very little mention of biblical basis.
- **Tosefta:** Additions to the Mishnah, including material that didn't make it into the Mishnah but was still considered valuable.
- **Talmudim:** There are two Talmuds: The Talmud of the Land of Israel (Jerusalem Talmud) and the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli). The Babylonian Talmud is known as "the sea of the Talmud," for it includes everything. The Talmud is a commentary on the Mishnah and brings in material from other sources.
- Quote: "Everything is in this. It's not organized. ... Everything is there. "
- **Midrashic Texts:** Compiled texts that provide further biblical exegesis, focusing primarily on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (with Genesis coming later).
- **Talmud Page Layout:** A typical page of the Babylonian Talmud includes: Mishnah, Gemara (commentary on the Mishnah), Rashi's commentary, additions from the 12th-13th centuries, and additions from the 16th century, demonstrating the dynamic and growing nature of the tradition.
- The Mishnah is a text that has a dynamic, growing tradition that is still being developed.

VI. Examples of Midrash

- **Sabbath Laws:** The Mishnah acknowledges that many laws regarding the Sabbath have little scriptural basis, but they provide 39 categories of forbidden work, rooted in an agriculturally based community.
- **Midrashic Principles:** The process of midrash involves:
 - Focus on unusual textual features.
 - Intertextuality (comparing texts across Torah).
 - Use of rhetorical patterns.
 - Torah as the foundation and guiding force.
- **Halakhic Midrash: "Eye for an Eye":** Rabbinic interpretation of "eye for eye" (Exodus 21) does not mean literal bodily harm but is rather, monetary compensation, demonstrating a principle of justice and mercy.
- **Halakhic Midrash: Warnings:** The rabbis viewed the "thou shalt nots" of the 10 commandments as essential warnings that came before the penalty, illustrating God's justice.
- **Agadic Midrash: Atonement Without Temple:** They developed ways of achieving atonement without the temple, including repentance, participation in the Day of Atonement, death, and chastisement.
- **Agadic Midrash: Joseph's Bones:** In a narrative expansion of Joseph's bones being carried out of Egypt, the rabbis developed a story with magical elements and included the concept of measure for measure justice, while connecting it to the ark of the covenant.

VII. Conclusion

- Rabbinic literature reveals the diverse and rich ways in which Jewish communities engaged with their sacred texts.
- The intention of these communities, no matter how diverse, was to apply and maintain the continuity of the biblical text and they understood it as divinely revealed.
- The materials provide insights into Jewish thought and practices, influencing both Jewish life and New Testament studies.

This briefing document captures the main themes and important ideas from the source, providing a comprehensive overview of rabbinic literature. The use of quotes helps to ground the summary in the author's own words, and the examples given help to illustrate the concepts presented.

4. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 17, Introduction to Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic Literature Study Guide

Quiz

1. What is the Mishnah, and when was it compiled? The Mishnah is a collection of halakhic teachings that represent the ideal principles of Torah and the Temple. It was compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince around 220 CE, though the teachings are based on oral traditions that preceded that time.
2. What is the "Judaism of the dual Torah," and how does the oral Torah relate to the written Torah? The "Judaism of the dual Torah" posits that Moses received both the written Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and an oral Torah at Mount Sinai. According to rabbinic tradition, the oral Torah is considered as authoritative as the written Torah.
3. What are the Tannaim, and what role did they play in the development of rabbinic literature? The Tannaim were pairs of teachers (scholars) who lived between about 90 CE to the early third century. They accurately repeated and transmitted oral traditions that eventually made up the Mishnah, ensuring the continuity of these teachings prior to their being written down.
4. What are the three main categories of rabbinic literature, and what does each focus on? The three main categories are *midrash*, *halakha*, and *agadah*. *Midrash* focuses on interpreting and exploring the meanings of biblical texts. *Halakha* deals with religious obligations and how one should conduct oneself. *Agadah* retells biblical narratives with imagination and storytelling.
5. What was the significance of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE to the development of rabbinic literature? The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans led to a shift in Jewish religious practice. Without the Temple, rabbinic leaders in Yavne refocused Judaism on deeds of love, Torah study, and prayer. They also emphasized studying Torah to apply principles to life without the physical temple.
6. What is the Gemara, and how does it relate to the Mishnah? The Gemara is a commentary on the Mishnah. It expands on the teachings and discussions found in the Mishnah. The Gemara also includes insights from the midrash and the Tosefta and is a key component of the Talmud.

7. What are the six orders of the Mishnah, and what is the primary focus of each order? The six orders of the Mishnah are Seeds (agricultural practices and blessings), Festivals (Sabbath and holy days), Women (marriage, contracts), Damages (legal matters and disputes), Holy Things (Temple practices and sacrifices), and Purities (ritual purity).
8. What is the significance of Rabbi Judah the Prince (Judah Hanasi) in the history of rabbinic literature? Judah the Prince compiled and redacted the oral teachings of the Tannaim into the Mishnah. This text is foundational for the development of rabbinic Judaism. He is of such importance, he is simply referred to as "Rabbi" in rabbinic texts.
9. How did the rabbis apply the principle "eye for eye" from the Torah in the Mishnah? Rather than literal application, the rabbis interpreted "eye for eye" as monetary compensation. They found support for this interpretation by comparing it to another verse that used the same verb in the context of compensation rather than literal physical harm.
10. What did the rabbis emphasize as the key to understanding the Torah? The rabbis emphasized that the Torah is a seamless, divinely revealed text with a unified message. They held that everything in the Torah interfaces and has intertextual connections.

Answer Key

1. The Mishnah is a collection of halakhic teachings that represent the ideal principles of Torah and the Temple. It was compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince around 220 CE, though the teachings are based on oral traditions that preceded that time.
2. The "Judaism of the dual Torah" posits that Moses received both the written Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and an oral Torah at Mount Sinai. According to rabbinic tradition, the oral Torah is considered as authoritative as the written Torah.
3. The Tannaim were pairs of teachers (scholars) who lived between about 90 CE to the early third century. They accurately repeated and transmitted oral traditions that eventually made up the Mishnah, ensuring the continuity of these teachings prior to their being written down.
4. The three main categories are *midrash*, *halakha*, and *agadah*. *Midrash* focuses on interpreting and exploring the meanings of biblical texts. *Halakha* deals with

religious obligations and how one should conduct oneself. *Agadah* retells biblical narratives with imagination and storytelling.

5. The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans led to a shift in Jewish religious practice. Without the Temple, rabbinic leaders in Yavne refocused Judaism on deeds of love, Torah study, and prayer. They also emphasized studying Torah to apply principles to life without the physical temple.
6. The Gemara is a commentary on the Mishnah. It expands on the teachings and discussions found in the Mishnah. The Gemara also includes insights from the midrash and the Tosefta and is a key component of the Talmud.
7. The six orders of the Mishnah are Seeds (agricultural practices and blessings), Festivals (Sabbath and holy days), Women (marriage, contracts), Damages (legal matters and disputes), Holy Things (Temple practices and sacrifices), and Purities (ritual purity).
8. Judah the Prince compiled and redacted the oral teachings of the Tannaim into the Mishnah. This text is foundational for the development of rabbinic Judaism. He is of such importance, he is simply referred to as "Rabbi" in rabbinic texts.
9. Rather than literal application, the rabbis interpreted "eye for eye" as monetary compensation. They found support for this interpretation by comparing it to another verse that used the same verb in the context of compensation rather than literal physical harm.
10. The rabbis emphasized that the Torah is a seamless, divinely revealed text with a unified message. They held that everything in the Torah interfaces and has intertextual connections.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the historical development of rabbinic literature, focusing on the key events and figures that shaped its formation. How did the destruction of the Second Temple impact this development?
2. Analyze the concept of the "dual Torah" and its significance in rabbinic Judaism. How does the oral Torah relate to the written Torah, and what does this relationship suggest about the nature of religious authority in this tradition?
3. Compare and contrast the three main genres of rabbinic literature—midrash, halakha, and agadah—providing examples of each and explaining their respective purposes. How do these genres work together to create a comprehensive understanding of Jewish law and tradition?
4. Explore the methods of interpretation used by the rabbis in their study of the Torah. How do they utilize techniques like intertextuality, rhetorical patterns, and atomistic readings to derive new meanings and applications from the biblical text? Provide examples from the study materials.
5. Evaluate the legacy of rabbinic literature in the broader context of Jewish history and culture. How has the tradition shaped Jewish identity, law, and practice, and what are some of the ways it continues to be relevant today?

Glossary of Key Terms

Agadah: (also Haggadah) A genre of rabbinic literature that includes stories, narratives, and imaginative retellings of biblical events.

Diaspora: The dispersion of the Jewish people outside of the land of Israel, beginning with the Babylonian exile.

Dual Torah: The rabbinic belief that Moses received two Torot on Mount Sinai: the written Torah and the oral Torah.

Gemara: A commentary on the Mishnah that forms part of the Talmud, providing discussion and analysis of the Mishnah's teachings.

Halakha: A genre of rabbinic literature that concerns religious law, obligations, and how one should conduct oneself.

Hellenism: The culture and influence of ancient Greece, which had a significant impact on the ancient world, including Judaism.

Midrash: A genre of rabbinic literature focused on interpreting and exploring the meanings of biblical texts, using various techniques to uncover deeper layers of meaning.

Mishnah: The first major written compilation of Jewish oral traditions, composed primarily of halakhic teachings and organized into six orders, redacted by Rabbi Judah the Prince.

Sanhedrin: A Jewish council or court that served as a legal and religious authority in ancient times. There were Sanhedrins of differing sizes, each authorized to handle different kinds of cases.

Tannaim: A group of rabbinic scholars who lived between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE, responsible for transmitting and developing the oral traditions that later formed the Mishnah.

Talmud: A central text of rabbinic Judaism, comprised of the Mishnah and the Gemara, containing extensive legal, ethical, and theological discussions. It exists in two versions, the Jerusalem (or Land of Israel) Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.

Tosefta: A collection of Jewish oral traditions that were not included in the Mishnah, serving as additional material for understanding the Mishnah.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 17, Introduction to Rabbinic Literature, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Rabbinic Literature

1. **What is Rabbinic Literature, and who were its primary authors?**
2. Rabbinic literature encompasses a vast collection of texts produced by the successors to the Pharisees, primarily from the 1st to 7th centuries CE. These texts represent their interpretations of the Hebrew Bible and their development of Jewish law and traditions. The key authors are primarily known as the Tannaim (repeaters) and Amoraim (explainers), scholars who orally transmitted and later compiled this body of knowledge. This includes Rabbi Judah the Prince (compiler of the Mishnah), but also many other named and unnamed teachers. The literature is diverse in genre, with Halakhah (legal and practical discussions) and Aggadah (narrative and interpretive material) coexisting.
3. **What is the "Dual Torah," and how does it relate to Rabbinic Literature?**
4. The "Dual Torah" concept posits that when Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai, he received both the written Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and the oral Torah. According to Rabbinic Judaism, the oral Torah is as important and authoritative as the written Torah. Rabbinic literature, particularly the Mishnah and the Talmud, is considered the written record of this oral Torah, with the core assertion that the oral Torah is a continuation of revelation. It provides a framework for understanding the biblical text and adapting it to changing circumstances. This oral Torah, transmitted through generations of rabbis, provided a means for dealing with complex situations not explicitly covered in the written Torah and thus a framework for the continuing practice of Judaism.

5. What is the Mishnah, and what is its significance?

6. The Mishnah is a collection of primarily halachic (legal) teachings compiled around 220 CE by Rabbi Judah the Prince. It is the first major written compilation of the oral Torah, organized into six major orders dealing with agriculture, festivals, women, damages, holy things, and purities. The Mishnah presents an idealized view of Jewish practice, including temple rituals, even after the Temple's destruction. It serves as the foundational text for rabbinic Judaism, influencing the development of Jewish law and providing a starting point for further commentary and interpretation. The Mishnah is primarily legalistic and deals little with direct biblical citations for the practices it describes.

7. What are the different genres of rabbinic literature, and how do they relate to each other?

8. Rabbinic literature contains various genres, including *Midrash* (interpretive explorations of the biblical text), *Halakhah* (legal and practical rules), and *Aggadah* (narrative and imaginative stories). Midrash uses biblical texts to answer religious questions. Halakhah is about how a person should live and observe the commandments. Aggadah includes stories, legends, and parables that are often used to make theological or moral points. These genres are not strictly separate; for example, there is both halakhic midrash and aggadic midrash. The Mishnah primarily contains Halakhah, while the Talmud integrates all three, providing commentary and expansion on the Mishnah through all three lenses. In effect they work together to provide a holistic understanding of the Torah and Jewish tradition.

9. What is the Talmud, and how does it relate to the Mishnah?

10. The Talmud is a massive commentary on the Mishnah, composed over several centuries. It consists of two main versions: the Talmud of the Land of Israel (compiled around 400 CE) and the Babylonian Talmud (compiled later, from 500-700 CE and beyond). The Talmud is composed of the Mishnah and the *Gemara*, which provides interpretations and discussions by later rabbis on the Mishnah's teachings and adds materials from other sources like *Midrash* and *Tosefta*. The Babylonian Talmud is much more extensive than the Talmud of the Land of Israel, and it is generally the reference point when people speak of the Talmud. The Talmud is complex, not organized like an encyclopedia, with commentary on commentary, and with linkages based on topics and rabbis who engaged the topic in question.

11. What role did the destruction of the Second Temple play in the development of Rabbinic Literature?

12. The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE had a profound impact on Judaism and the development of rabbinic literature. The absence of the Temple forced a shift in religious practice, with the emphasis moving from temple sacrifice to prayer, Torah study, and deeds of loving kindness. Rabbinic leaders such as Yochanan ben Zakkai convened in Yavne to restructure Jewish life after the Temple's destruction. The Mishnah, in a sense, represented all the things that were part of the temple in terms that allowed Judaism to continue without having the physical structure of the Temple. Rabbinic literature thus became crucial in redefining Judaism in a world without a central Temple, shaping it into the religion we recognize today.

13. How do Rabbis use the Hebrew Bible to interpret religious practices and ethics?

14. Rabbis employ various methods to interpret the Hebrew Bible, including midrashic techniques. They focus on unusual wordings, intertextuality, and analogical reasoning. For halakhic interpretations, they look for connections to legal and moral principles within the Torah. Through rhetoric, they build connections between Biblical concepts. They approach the Bible as a seamless, cohesive whole, so chronological distinctions are not necessarily important. For example, while scripture says "an eye for an eye," they also look to passages using similar words to justify monetary compensation. They also developed specific rules for how to interpret the text. They believe that the Torah speaks on many levels. Ultimately, rabbinic interpretation seeks to maintain the continuity and applicability of the text to the lived experience of Jewish people.

15. Can you provide an example of an Aggadic and Halakhic Midrash?

- **Halakhic Midrash:** An example is the discussion of "eye for an eye" in Exodus. Rather than a literal interpretation, rabbis interpret it as monetary compensation by making connections to other verses and employing intertextuality. This interpretation is part of a broader discussion that seeks to find justice while also being compassionate. Another halakhic midrash demonstrates through rhetorical patterns in Exodus 20 that each of the prohibitions is preceded by a warning that is found elsewhere in the Torah; therefore, God's justice includes the warning.
- **Aggadic Midrash:** A good example is the story of Moses finding Joseph's bones. The rabbis, through imagination and biblical narrative, tell the story of Joseph, his coffin, and an oath he made in Genesis. The story explains how Joseph's bones were brought out of Egypt and emphasizes that Joseph kept all of the commandments, even though he lived before they were given. This story reinforces the importance of justice in narrative form.