

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Laws of Slavery between the Bible and the Rabbis - 7161

Last update 24-03-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Talmud & Halacha

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Orit Malka

Coordinator Email: orit.malka@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Coordinate via e-mail

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Malka Orit

Course/Module description:

Slavery occupies a central place in ancient cultures, including in the Bible and rabbinic literature. As human beings who can be owned, the male and female slaves exist in a liminal space between people and objects. They are purchased with money but are entitled to protections against violence or degrading labor. Their children, born into slavery, belong to the master, yet a maidservant may become a legal wife whose children are free. They retain their ethnic identity, which affects the legitimacy of their enslavement and the conditions of their bondage. However, as members of the master's household, they are involuntary participants in a new ethnic community and take part in its rituals. Being on the threshold and margins of the political community, the laws concerning slaves reveal the foundations of the concept of citizenship held by the authors of ancient texts.

In the course, we will study the laws concerning male and female slaves in rabbinic literature, with an emphasis on their regulation in halakhic midrashim and a comparative perspective with biblical law. The course will follow the Mekhilta on Parashat Mishpatim (selectively) and progress through close reading of the text and its parallels. The focus on slave laws as they appear in halakhic midrash will allow for a deep understanding of the characteristics of midrash, alongside an exploration of how the sages' perception of slavery differs from that of the Bible.

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

The course will provide textual and analytical skills for analysis and comparison. Students will become familiar with midrashic techniques as well as different models of slavery in the Bible and rabbinic literature. They will also learn to identify the key legal questions concerning the status of the slave versus that of a free person, as they emerge from the texts.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:

Course/Module Content:

Hebrew Slave and Canaanite Slave
Methods of Acquisition and Release
The Slave's Obligation in Commandments
The Slave as a Bearer of Civil and Financial Obligations
Marriage and Family Ties of Slaves
The Difference Between a Male Slave and a Female Slave
The Slave and the Son
The Maidservant and the Concubine
The Uncircumcised Canaanite Slave
Hard Labor vs. Regular Slave Labor
Captured Slaves and Their Redemption
The Slave as a Convert

Required Reading:

To be announced

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Home Exam % 80
Active Participation / Team Assignment 20 %

Additional information: