

Initial Notes on Studying the Bible for Meaning ver 1.0 9 Oct 21
Rabbi Mordecai Finley

The Bible per se

Do not read the Bible as a source for theology – not for a coherent image of the divine. God is not portrayed as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent or always good.

Basic, stable meaning of the text – words, grammar, syntax, sentences, units of meaning. (Jewish Study Bible – Adele Berlin; Jewish Publication Society)

Literary – reworking ancient myths, characters, scenes, styles, motifs, types, genres such narrative, law, poetry, maxims, and theology, irony, tragedy, etiology (origins of how things are), figures of speech (e.g. metaphors, simile, paradox) ridicule, sarcasm, idioms, point of view, motivations, expose, polemics, etc.

How meaning is conveyed – order of texts and ideas, how sources are woven together, connections between verses and narratives, the stated vs. the unstated, internal contradictions.

Dating Historical background – Israelite and surrounding nations and cultures. Tensions within Israelite society and culture.

Sources – J, E, P, D, R etc.

Philosophy / Philosophic Anthropology (the human condition) (Reflective through law and narrative)

Psychological – inner lives of characters

Symbolic Meaning

Archetypal Psychology

Rabbinic

Aggadah in Talmud and Midrash – imaginative possibilities.

Commentaries

Rashi – mostly a compilation of various Rabbinic interpretations woven together to create his own quilt of the meaning of Torah. (Many other commentators to be studied)

Examples of Study: Leviticus 19, Genesis 1-4, 6-9

Other Interpretations

Kabbalistic, Chasidic.

Modern Studies – e.g., Robert Alter, Franke Kermode

Modern Synthesis - Zornberg