Barnett Kamen כתובים—The Writings Syllabus

Welcome to a 12 unit series on the third section of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. *Ketuvim*, the Writings, is comprised of various genres; poetry, wisdom, philosophy, and history. *Ketuvim* begins with three long books, Psalms, 150 chapters, Proverbs, 31 chapters, and Job, 42 chapters. They are followed by the five *Megilot*, the Scrolls, in order of the holidays on which they are read, Passover and the Song of Songs, Shavuot and Ruth, Tisha B'av and Lamentations, Succoth and *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), and Esther and Purim. The last books of *Ketuvim* are historical, describing the return to Judah and Jerusalem and the re-building of the Temple and the city. *Ketuvim* concludes with a retelling of the period of the kings of Judah and Israel.

Required Readings:

Reading the book for each un it before the lecture is recommended. Reading the book after the lecture is required.

Recommended Readings

Herman Gunkel, The Psalms
Estelle Berlin, Introduction to her JPS Commentary on Esther.
Encyclopedia Judaica for an in depth look at each book.

Unit 1—Psalms
Unit 2—Proverbs
Unit 3—Job
Unit 4—Song of Songs
Unit 5—Ruth
Unit 6—Lamentations
Unit 7—Ecclesiastes

Unit 8—Esther

Unit 9—Daniel

Unit 10—Ezra

Unit 11—Nehemiah

Unit 12—I an II Chronicles

Topics of Discussion:

1. Psalms
    a. Definition of poetry.
    b. Devices of poetry and how it enhances meaning and interpretation.
    c. Poetry and song in biblical Hebrew are the same word, a poem is a song because it is sung.
    d. Authorship and dating.
    e. Elements of psalm poetry; praise, petition, thanks.
    f. *Sitz Im Leben*—use of Psalms as religious poetry indicated its cultic origin. Psalms 120 to 134, songs of ascent, and 146 to 150, songs of praise.
    g. The theology of the Psalms.
    h. The Psalms as a source of historical information—poetry is an older and therefore a more reliable witness than prose narrative.
    i. Wisdom elements in Psalms.

2. Proverbs
    a. Attempt at a definition of Wisdom,
    b. Proverbs as the means and end to Wisdom.
    c. The similarities of Proverbs to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.
    d. Authorship and dating.
    e. Wisdom personified.
    f. Pithy sayings as a means to acquire wisdom.

g. Who wrote and who collected wisdom sayings.

h. The enigmatic conclusion, *Eshet Hayil,* a woman of valor.

3. Job

a. The narrative opening and. conclusion.

b. The issue that is being debated by God and the Satan.

c. The role of Satan.

d. The arguments of Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and Job's rebuttal.

e. The inclusion of Elihu in chapters 32 to 37.

f. Job's understanding of what happened to him and God's response to that.

g. Importance of Job not being an Israelite, but from the land of Utz. Friends have Israelite names.

h. Uniqueness of Job as the only book in dialogue format.

i, Rabbinic understanding of Job as a fiction.

4. Song of Songs

a. Debate among the rabbis to include Song of Songs in the Tanakh—a metaphorical or a literal interpretation.

b. The various attempts to determine the *Site Im Leben,*

c. Sensuality of the Song of Songs that appeal to all the senses.

d. The Song of Songs describing the development from lust to love.

e. Agricultural associations—the beauty of nature.

f. The Song of Songs as a collection of separate love poetry.

g. The Song of Songs is connected and tells a definite story,

h. The freedom of sexuality.

5. Ruth

    a. Outline of the story.

    b. The ending of the book with a genealogy that leads to David.

    c. Strange name of the children.

    d. Author and redactor do not castigate the marriage with Moabite women—implications of David as grandson of Moabite woman.

    e. Legal issues in the story.

    f. Sexual innuendos in the story.

    h. Ruth as protest to Nehemiah.

6. Lamentations

    a. Authorship ascribed to Jeremiah—Rashi's comment to Jeremah 36.

    b. The use of an alphabetic acrostic.

    c. Lament over both the city and the state of the author as a result of the destruction.

    d. Comparison to Psalm 137.

    e. Lamentation as eye-witness account of the destruction of Jerusalem

    f. The lack of assurance of a return—not prophetic.

7. *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes)

    a. *Qohelet* as philosophy—comparison to Epicurean philosophy.

    b. Possible nuances of *Hevel*, a mist or vapor.

    c. The pursuit for material possessions.

    d. *Qohelet*'s description of the human condition,

    e. The depiction of God in *Qohelet*.

    f. The question of an after-life.

    g. The issues of pre-determination and free will.

    h. Social justice and the question of Solomonic authorship.

8. Esther

a. The historical issues in the book.

b. Esther as comedy.

c. Esther as a satire on kingship.

d. Assimilation in Esther.

e. Haman, the king, and anti-Semitism.

f. Character development in the story—female hero.

g. Esther as a Zionist document or a prescription for life in exile.

h. Comparison of Esther to other female heroines in the Tanakh.

i. God's hidden role.

9. Daniel

a. Chapters 1-6 are third person narratives, chapter 7-12 are apocalyptic visions.

b. Vegetarian superior diet—issues of Kashrut.

c. Similarities and differences of Daniel to the story of Joseph—rise to leadership, dream interpretation.

d. Similarities and differences to the story of Esther—not bowing, anti-Semitism.

e. Miraculous elements, unique to *Ketuvim*—recognition by a foreign king of the God of Israel.

f. Historical issues.

g. Use of Aramaic—authorship and dating.

h. Chapters 7-12, switch to first person, apocalyptic visions—messianic speculation.

i. Differences in modes of revelation—dreams, visions, angelic pronouncements,

10. Ezra

a. Historical issues—the dating of the events in Ezra, and the history of the text.

b. Comparison of the edict of Cyrus to Ezra.

c. Ezra as priest and Ezra as scribe—public reading of the Torah as well as sacrifice.

d. The issue with the Samaritans.

e. Intermarriage

11. Nehemiah
    a. Historical perspective
    b. Emphasis on emotions
    c. Emphasis on expensive maintenance of the Temple and the Levites.
    d. Written genealogies to establish historical proof
    e. Expulsion of the Moabites and Ammonites.
    f. The written Torah as the law of the land

12. I and II Chronicles
    a. Importance of genealogies—continued.
    b. A comparison of I Chronicles, chapters 10-29, David, to I and II Samuel.
    c. A comparison of II Chronicles, chapters 1-9, Solomon, to I Kings.
    d. A comparison of II Chronicles, chapters 10-36, the kings of Judah, to II Kings.
    e. The theology of Chronicles.
    f. The historicity of Chronicles:
        a. The sources
        b. A comparison of the reign of Josiah in II Kings 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-35.
    g. The purpose of the Books of Chronicles