

GSH623

Rashi and the 'Peshat' Interpretation of the Bible

Dr. Golan Broshi

Day and time of course:

February 11 – May 6, 2026
Wednesdays, 16:00-19:00

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School year: 2026

Course Description

This course shall focus on the works and motives of Rashi and his contemporaries. Rashi – Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki – lived in the 11th Century in France, during a time when persecution against Jewish communities was on the rise. Rashi is still considered the foremost commentators of the Tanakh (and the Talmud) among Traditional Judaism. He is known for his "Pshat" method, which attempts to give the simplest and literally meaning of the texts. Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that a vast percentage of his interpretations were apologetic in nature; meaning, his commentary was far from being the "Pshat" of Scriptures. Rather, it was a way to protect his Jewish community against the Christian interpretation, especially concerning Messianic verses and prophecies from the Old Testament.

Course Goals

1. To inform the students with the religious and cultures background of Rashi's times.
2. To get the students more familiar with Rabbinic interpretation of scriptures.
3. To give the students a taste of Rashi's most famous commentaries of the Tankah.
4. To inform the student with Jewish-Christian relations, through the eyes of Rashi.

Learning Outcome

1. The students will be more sensitive to the circumstances of Rashi's commentary.
2. The students will learn to appreciate Rabbinic methods of interpretation in its right context.
3. The students would learn the motives of Rashi's commentary and will know how to respond accordingly.
4. The students will learn to appreciate more the reasons behind the 'parting of the ways', concerning Jewish-Christian relations, especially through Rashi's point of view. Thus, they will grow more sensitive towards Jewish antagonism concerning the Gospel.

Course Structure

The lessons will be held through a Zoom format, consisting of lectures and interactive discussions between all participation. All together there will be 10 three hour (with breaks) Live zoom lectures. Recordings will be available to registered students.

Requirements and Grading

Active participation during all lessons and fulfillment of reading assignments for next lesson (all ten papers are available at the course's website); at the end of the semester, students must report percentage of reading directly to teacher via e-mail	20%
reading assignments: Students must choose <i>two books</i> , one from each list below (under "Must Read") and submit <i>two written reports</i> (one on each book) consisting of the following: 1- a short summary for each of the two books; <i>300 words</i> for each book; 2- a personal critique (i.e., feedback/reflection) for each of the two books; <i>300 words</i> for each book; send to teacher via e-mail	30%
Final paper: Students must choose one topic from the list below (under "Class dates and topics for each lesson") and present a paper consisting of the following: 1- exposition of the topic by a way of introduction; 2- manifesting at least two opposing sides concerning the chosen subject; 3- concluding the paper by presenting your personal viewpoint on the chosen topic (in total: <i>1000 words</i> , using at least 5 bibliographical citations, apart from the Bible); send to teacher via e-mail	50%
Total Grade	100%

Main Texts

- The Bible
- PDF Articles, for each week (available at the course's website)
- Rashi's commentary, available at: https://www.sefaria.org.il/Rashi_on_Genesis.1.1.1?lang=en
- Much of this course is inspired by Avraham Grossman's new book: *Rashi and the Jewish-Christian Polemic*, 2021 (still available only in Hebrew: רש"י והפולמוס היהודי-הנוצרי (אברהם גרוסמן – רש"י והפולמוס היהודי-הנוצרי))

Must Read (choose *two books* for reading assignment, one from each list):

- Please choose one book from list A:

1. Bonchek, Avigdor. What's Bothering Rashi?. Philipp Feldheim, 1997.
2. Grossman, Avraham. Rashi. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press, 2014.
3. Kearney, J. Rashi – Linguist despite Himself. New York and London, 2010.
4. Liber, Maurice. Rashi: A Historical Biography of the Man Who Shaped Jewish Biblical Commentary. Independently published, 2025.
5. Owen, Aron. Rashi: His Life and Times. London: Jewish Religious Educational Publications 1955.
6. Shulman, Yaacov David. Rashi: The Story of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. Moscow, 1993.

- Please choose one book from list B:

1. Bar-Asher Siegal. Michal. Jewish-Christian Dialogues on Scripture in Late Antiquity: Heretic Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud. Cambridge University Press, 2019.
2. Boyarin, Daniel. Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity. University of Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
3. Brown, Michael L. Our Hands Are Stained With Blood. Destiny Image Pub., 1992.
4. Dunn, James D. G. (Ed.). Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A. D. 70 to 135. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.
5. Crawford, J. Brian. The Scandal of a Divine Messiah: A Response to Maimonidean and Kabbalistic Challenges to the Incarnation. Wipf & Stock, 2024.
6. Maccoby, Hyam. Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages. The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press, 1993.
7. McCaul, Alexander. The Old Paths, or The Talmud Tested by Scripture. Andesite Press, 2017.
8. Neusner, Jacob. Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash. Baker Academic, 2004.
9. Porton, Gary G. Understanding Rabbinic Midrash. Ktav Pub. House, 1985.
10. Rydelnik, Michael. The Messianic Hope. B&H Academic, 2010.
11. Safrai, Zeev. The Literature of the Sages, Midrash, and Targum. Fortress Press, 2007.
12. Synan, Edward A. The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages. Macmillan, 1965.
13. Yuval, Israel Jacob. Two nations in your womb. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008.

Class dates and topics for each lesson

Date	Topic	Assignment
Feb 11	Introduction to course; the fall of Biblical Judaism and the rise of the 'Rabbinic Church'; the literary context of Second Temple period; The way the Oral-Law treated the Tanakh and used it	Blumenfield, "Rashi, the Teacher in Israel"
Feb 18	The parting of the ways; Conversion, Theology and religious practice of the two churches: Messianic Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism; Jewish-"Christian" relations	Touitou, "Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1—6 in the Context of Judeo-Christian Controversy"
Feb 25	Main three types of Rabbinic literature: Midrash, Halachah and Haggadah; the rise of Biblical commentary; examples	Lawee, "Biblical Scholarship in Late Medieval Ashkenaz: The Turn to Rashi Supercommentary"
Mar 4	The Messianic-Rabbinic debate, turning into a Jewish-Christian polemics; examples	Bergman, "Rashi as Commentator"
Mar 11	Towards the end of the Middle-Ages: The golden age of Rabbinic commentary and the introduction of the 'Pshat' method; examples	Zeitlin, "RASHI [Rabbi Solomon of France]"
Mar 18	The 'Minim' as Messianic Jews, in Rabbinic thought and especially in Rashi's commentary; The destiny of Gentiles in the world to come; Examples	Signer, "King/Messiah: Rashi's Exegesis of Psalm 2"
Mar 25	Rashi interpretation: 'Pshat' or Polemics? Examples	Walton, "In Defense of the Church Militant: The Censorship of the Rashi Commentary in the Magna Biblia Rabbinica"
Apr 1	Passover Holiday, no class	
Apr 8	Passover Holiday, no class	
Apr 15	Rashi interpretation: reasons and objectives; Examples	Lawee, "The Reception of Rashi's Commentary on the Torah in Spain: The Case of Adam's Mating with the Animals"
Apr 22	Israel Independence Day, no class	
Apr 29	Rashi commentary: hidden debate with Christian interpretation; Examples	Shereshevsky, "Rashi's and Christian Interpretations"
May 6	The effect of Rashi's legacy on Jewish thought today and the Messianic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible; summary of the course	Schoenfeld, "One Song Too Many"

Bibliography

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2. Bar-Asher Siegal, Michal. *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
3. Bar-Asher Siegal, Michal. *Jewish-Christian Dialogues on Scripture in Late Antiquity: Heretic Narratives of the Babylonian Talmud*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.
4. Becker, Adam H. (Ed.). *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Fortress Press, 2007.
5. Bekkum, W. J. Van. "Hebrew Grammatical Tradition in the Exegesis of Rashi". in *Rashi 1040–1990*, ed. G. Sed-Rajna, Paris 1993, pp. 427–436
6. Berger, David. *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*. Generic, 1996.
7. Bergman, Bernard. "RASHI AS COMMENTATOR". *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1958, pp. 104–116.
8. Blum, Edwin & Rydelnik, Michael (Eds.). *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*. Moody Publishers, 2019.
9. Bock, Darrell and Glaser, Mitch. *To the Jew First*. Gr Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008.
10. Bock, Darrell and Glaser, Mitch (Eds.). *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A biblical response to the current conflict*. Kregel Publications, 2018 .
11. Bonchek, Avigdor. *What's Bothering Rashi?*. Philipp Feldheim, 1997.
12. Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. University of Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
13. Boyarin, Daniel. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. The New Press, 2012.
14. Brown, Michael L. *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood*. Destiny Image Pub., 1992.
15. Brown, Michael L. *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*. Volumes 1 – 4, Gr. Rapids: Baker, 1990 – 2006, and Volume 5, 2010.
16. Caputo, Nina. *Debating Truth: The Barcelona Disputation of 1263, a Graphic History (comics)*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
17. Carroll, James. *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2002.
18. Chavel, Charles B. *The Disputation at Barcelona: Ramban (Nahmanides)*. BNpublishing, 2017.
19. Cohen, Abraham. *The parting of the ways: Judaism and the rise of Christianity*. Published for the World Jewish Congress, 1954.
20. Cohen, Gershon. "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought". *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Harvard press University, 1967, Vol. IV.
21. Cohen, Naomi. "Bruria in the Bavli and in Rashi 'Avodah Zarah' 18B". *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, vol. 48, no. 2/3, 2015, pp. 29–40.
22. Cohn-Sherbock. *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism*. Gr. Rapids: Eerdman's, 1997.
23. Cohn-Sherbok. Dan. *Messianic Judaism: A Critical Anthology*. Continuum, 2001.
24. Cohen, Akiva. *Matthew and the Mishnah: Redefining Identity and Ethos in the Shadow of the Second Temple's Destruction*. Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

25. Collins, John J. *The Invention of Judaism: Torah and Jewish Identity from Deuteronomy to Paul*. University of California Press, 2017.
26. Crawford, J. Brian. *The Scandal of a Divine Messiah: A Response to Maimonidean and Kabbalistic Challenges to the Incarnation*. Wipf & Stock, 2024.
27. De Lange, Nicholas R.M. *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian relations in third-century Palestine*. Cambridge University Press, 1977.
28. Diamond, James A. "Nahmanides and Rashi on the One Flesh of Conjugal Union: Lovemaking vs. Duty". *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 102, no. 2, 2009, pp. 193–224.
29. Dunn, James D. G. (Ed.). *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A. D. 70 to 135*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.
30. Dunn, James D.G. *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. SCM Press, 2006.
31. Eckardt, A. Roy. *Jews and Christians, the contemporary meeting*. Indiana University Press, 1986.
32. Englander, H. "Rashi's View of the Weak Roots". *Hebrew Union College Annual VII (1930)*, pp. 399–437.
33. Englander, H. "Grammatical Elements and Terminology in Rashi's Biblical Commentaries". *Hebrew Union College Annual XI (1936)*, pp. 367–389; *XII–XIII (1937–1938)*, pp. 505–521.
34. Englander, H. "A Commentary on Rashi's Grammatical Comments". *Hebrew Union College Annual XVII (1942–1943)*, pp. 427–498.
35. Evans, Craig A. and Hagner, Donald. *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
36. Evans, Craig & Mishkin, David (Eds.), *A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2019.
37. Evans, Craig & Mishkin, David (Eds.). *A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Gospels*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2022.
38. Fisher, Eugene, Klenicki, Leon (Eds.). *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Christian Dialogue*. Stimulus Books, 1990.
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42. Fredriksen, Paula. *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle*. Yale University Press, 2017.
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45. Fruchtenbaum, Arnold. *Israelology*. San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 1994.
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139. Yuval, Israel Jacob. *Two nations in your womb*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008.
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