

A Short Guide to Writing Research Papers on Early Judaism

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The following notes and references are meant to help you to organize and compose a traditional academic research paper on early Judaism. You may find the basic sequence and resources helpful in other disciplines, too, especially in religious studies, philosophy and history. Short or long, your research paper can be crafted in five steps:

Contents

- 1. Choosing a Topic**
- 2. Researching Your Topic**
- 3. Outlining Your Argument**
- 4. Writing Your Paper**
- 5. Reworking Your Draft**

1. Choosing a Topic

Your topic may be chosen for you but if not, aim for one that is (1) interesting to you, (2) manageable (with readily available sources) and malleable (so you can narrow in on an especially interesting or important aspect), and (3) arguable. Your research paper will essentially be an argument based on the available primary and secondary sources and authorities.

Specific topics might be suggested by points in the chapters of *The Emergence of Judaism*, by questions posed in your classroom, by the further readings, by your own religious or historical interests, or others. For example, in the area of Biblical Israel and Rabbinic Judaism such topics as these might suggest themselves.

Israelite-Judean religion vs. biblical religion

Genesis 1-11 in its Ancient Near Eastern context

Biblical creation myths: theology and anthropology

The biblical and rabbinic concept of covenant

The biblical and rabbinic concept of election

The biblical and rabbinic purity system

Social justice in the Bible and rabbinic literature

Women in the Bible

The Exodus: History or Paradigmatic myth?

Definitions of Jewish identity in the biblical and Talmudic periods

The Messiah concept in the Hebrew Bible

The Role of Cult in the Prophetic Writings

Conceptions of the Afterlife in the Hebrew Bible and later Judaism

Non-Israelites in biblical and rabbinic tradition

Second Temple period sectarianism – Origins and character

The apocalyptic world view – origins and function

The Pharisees in Josephus, New Testament and rabbinic sources

Jewish responses to Hellenism: accommodation or resistance?

Philo's exegesis of the Bible

Responses to the Destruction in 70 C.E.

The Cessation of Prophecy and the rise of Rabbis

Synagogues in 1st-6th c. Palestine: Form and Function

The *yetzer ha-ra* (evil inclination)

Rabbinic exegesis of Scripture

Eve (or: any biblical character) as interpreted by rabbinic tradition

Rabbinic anthropology

Women in Jewish law

Sexuality and Marriage in the Talmud

Immortality(or: life after death; the or: world to come) in rabbinic literature

Ideal types in rabbinic literature

Messianism in rabbinic Judaism

Intermarriage and conversion in biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism

Resources for Choosing a Topic and Beginning a Research Paper

Print Resources

- Booth, Wayne, Gregory C. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Brown, Scott G. *A Guide to Writing Academic Essays in Religious Studies*. London: Continuum Books, 2008.
- Luey, Beth. *Handbook for Academic Authors*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Mann, Thomas. *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Preece, Roy. *Starting Research: An Introduction to Academic Research and Dissertation Writing*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994.
- Turabian, Kate L., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

2. Researching Your Topic

Material about your topic may reside in a single text or an array of texts by several authors. In most cases, you can build your research by moving from general to specific treatments of your topic. Research papers on the transformation of a biblical idea, theme or character in the post-biblical and rabbinic periods will require consultation of biblical commentaries and concordances as listed below.

One caution: in your research, it is vital that you not allow your expanding knowledge of what others think about your topic to drown your own curiosities, sensibilities, and insights. Instead, as your initial questions expand and then diminish with increased knowledge from your research, your own deeper concerns, insights, and point of view should emerge and grow.

A. Consult Standard Sources and Build Bibliography

Encyclopedia articles, standard reference tools and primary source commentaries contain a wealth of material as well as helpful bibliographies to orient you in your topic and its historical or textual context. Look for the best, most authoritative and up-to-date treatments. Checking cross-references will deepen your knowledge. Some of the most widely used resources, available in most college libraries, are:

Encyclopedia Judaica. Fred Skolnik, ed. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006.

The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life and Thought. Chaim Pearl, ed. Philadelphia: Coronet Books, Inc. 1996.

Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts, ed. Philip Birnbaum. Rev. ed. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1979.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. New York: Adama Books, 1996.

The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical issues. Nachum Amsel, ed. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996.

The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary. 5 volume set ed. Nahum Sarna and Chaim Potok, eds. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

Anchor Bible Series. David Noel Freedman, ed. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964-.

Anchor Bible Dictionary. David Noel Freedman, ed., et al. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Harper Collins Bible Commentary. James L. Mays, gen. ed., et al. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000.

Harper Collins Bible Dictionary. Paul. J. Achtemeier, gen. ed., et al. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996.

The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, gen. ed., et al. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006-

Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study. Frederick W. Danker. Rev. and exp. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. James Strong. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010).

Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Robert Young. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984.

Oxford Guide to Ideas & Issues of the Bible. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

B. Check Periodical Literature

Your research will likely lead you to articles in academic journals and periodicals. In consulting the chief articles dealing with your topic, you'll learn where agreements, disagreements, and open questions stand, how older treatments have fared, and the latest relevant tools and insights.

Since you cannot consult them all, work back from the latest, looking for the best and most directly relevant articles from the last five, ten, or twenty years, as ambition and time allow.

The place to start is the ATLA Religion Database, which indexes articles, essays, book reviews, dissertations, theses, and even essays in collections. You can search by keyword, subject, and person. Other standard indexes to periodical literature, most in print but some now available on CD-ROM or on the Internet, include:

Religion Index One/Two

Religious and Theological Abstracts

Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature (Net, CD)

Old Testament Abstracts, 1978—

Dissertation Abstracts International (Net, CD)

Humanities Index (Net, CD)

Online resources are less systematically available and up-to-date. But you can find links and some full articles and bibliographies online. Guides to the relevant websites are housed at.

“Wabash Center Guide to Internet Resources for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion”: http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide_headings.aspx

The following site has links to secondary research articles, reviews, discussions, pictures, web resources and primary sources:

Internet Jewish History Sourcebook (site maintained and edited by Paul Halsall) at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishsbok.html>

The following site has primary and secondary sources, bibliographies, newspaper articles, videos, images, maps, artifacts and websites for Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period:

Center for Online Judaic Studies at <http://jewishhistory.com/>

C. Research the Most Important Books and Primary Sources

By now you can also identify the most important resources for your topic, both primary and secondary. Primary sources are actual historical sources that provide data for interpretation: the Bible, Philo, Josephus, Mishnah, Talmud and various works of midrash, for example. Secondary sources are all the articles or books that analyze or interpret primary sources. Your research topic might be in a single primary source, for example, the ritual purity laws of Leviticus, with countless secondary commentaries, analyses, or interpretations. Conversely, your primary resources may be vast – a collection of narratives about an important religious personality or all

instances of a religious term (such as covenant or the world-to-come) in rabbinic literature, with more or less existing scholarly research.

Apart from books you've identified through the other sources you've consulted, you can find the chief works on any topic readily listed in:

- *Your college or university library's catalog
- *The Library of Congress Subject Index at catalog.loc.gov
- *Other online library catalog sites. Many theological libraries and archives are linked at the "Religious Studies Web Guide": www.Ucalgary.ca/~lipton/catalogues.html. One excellent theological library catalog is:
- *Yale University Divinity School Library: www.library.yale.edu/div/divhome.htm.

The eventual quality of your research paper rests entirely on the quality or critical character of your sources. The best research uses academically sound treatments by recognized authorities arguing rigorously from primary sources.

D. Taking Notes

With these sources on hand – whether primary or secondary, whether in books or articles or Websites – you can review each source, noting down its most important or relevant facts, observations or opinions. Each point or cluster of points is put on a separate note card, keyed to a main bibliographical card for that source. As a memory aid for you, the main bibliographic card or entry for each source can also include a thumbnail sketch of its argument or import or point of view. Take notes only on the relevant portions of secondary sources or you will be burdened by too much minutiae.

While students still use index cards to record their notes, a carefully constructed set of computer notes or files, retrievable by topic or source name or number, can be just as helpful. Either way – cards or computer – you'll need for each notable point to identify:

- *the subtopic
- *the source
- *the main idea or quote

This practice will allow you to redistribute each card or point to wherever it is needed in your eventual outline.

E. Note or Quote?

While most of the notes you take will simply summarize points made in primary or secondary sources, direct quotes are used for (1) word-for-word transcriptions, (2) key words or phrases coined by the author, or (3) especially clear or helpful or summary formulations of an author's point of view. Remember, re-presenting another's insight or formulation without attribution is plagiarism. You should also be sure to keep separate notes about your own ideas or insights into the topic as they evolve.

F. When Can I Stop?

As you research your topic in books, articles, or reference works, you will find it coalescing into a unified body of knowledge or at least into a set of interrelated questions. In most cases, your topic will become more and more focused, partly because that is where the open question or key insight or most illuminating instance resides, and partly for sheer manageability. The vast range of scholarly methods and opinions or sharply differing points of view about a topic may force you to settle on a more carefully circumscribed topic. While the sources may never run out, your increased knowledge gradually gives you confidence that you have the most informed, authoritative and critical sources covered in your notes.

3. Outlining Your Argument

On the basis of your research findings, outline your argument by refining or reformulating your general topic into a specific question answered by a defensible thesis or hypothesis. You then arrange or rework your supporting materials into a clear outline that will coherently and convincingly present your thesis to your reader.

First, review your research notes carefully. Some of what you initially read now seems obvious or irrelevant, or perhaps the whole topic is simply too massive. But, as your reading and note-taking progressed, you might also have found a piece of your topic, from which a key question or problem has emerged and around which your research has gelled. Ask yourself:

- *What is the subtopic or subquestion that is most interesting, enlightening, and manageable?
- *What have been the most clarifying and illuminating insights I have found into the topic?
- *In what ways have my findings contradicted by initial expectations? Can this serve as a clue to a new and different approach to my question?
- *Can I frame my question in a clear way and, in light of my research, do I have something new to say and defend – my thesis or hypothesis – that will answer my question and clarify my materials?

In this way you will advance from topic and initial question to specific question and thesis.

For example, as you research primary and secondary sources on rabbinic views of prophecy, you might conclude that the rabbinic view held a negative view of prophecy, deeming it to have ceased by their time. So you have:

- *Topic: Rabbinic view of prophecy
- *Specific question: Why is the dominant rabbinic view of prophecy negative and how did the rabbis understand God to communicate with Israel in their day?
- *Thesis: The rabbis consigned charismatic and apostolic prophecy to the biblical past and viewed interpretation of Torah by rabbinic sages as providing access to God's will, because of the destabilizing force of prophetic figures.

You can then outline a presentation of your thesis that marshals your research materials into an orderly and convincing argument. Functionally, your outline might look like this:

1. Introduction: Raise the key question/s (rabbinic literatures pronounces that prophecy had ceased in their day – why? And how did they understand God as communicating with Israel?) and announce your thesis.
2. Background. Present the necessary literary or historical or theological context of the question. Note the “state of the question” or the main agreements and disagreements about it.
3. Development. Present your own insight in a clear and logical way. Marshal evidence to support your thesis and develop it further by:

- *offering examples from your primary sources

- *citing or discussing authorities to bolster your argument

- *contrasting your thesis with other treatments, either historical or contemporary

- *confirming it by showing how it makes good sense of the data or answers related questions or solves previous puzzles.

4. Conclusion. Restate the thesis in a way that recapitulates your argument and its consequences for the field.

The more detailed your outline, the easier will be your writing. Go through your cards, reorganizing them according to your outline. Fill in the outline with the specifics from your research, right down to the topic sentences of your paragraphs. Don't be shy about setting aside any materials that now seem off-point, extraneous, or superfluous to the development of your argument.

4. Writing Your Paper

You are now ready to draft your paper, essentially by putting your outline into sentence form while incorporating specifics from your research notes.

Your main task, initially, is just to get it down on paper in as straightforward a way as possible. Assume your reader is intelligent but knows little or nothing about your particular topic. You can follow your outline closely, but you may find that logical presentation of your argument requires adjusting the outline somewhat. As you write, weave in quotes judiciously from primary or secondary literature to clarify or add weight to your points. Add brief, strong headings at major junctures. Add footnotes to acknowledge ideas, attribute quotations, reinforce your key points through authorities, or refer the reader to further discussion or resources. Your draft footnotes might refer to your sources as abbreviated in source cards, with page numbers; you can add full publishing data once your text is firm.

5. Reworking Your Draft

Your rough draft puts you within sight of your goal, but your project's real strength emerges from reworking your initial text in a series of revisions and refinements. In this final phase,

make frequent use of one of the many excellent style manuals available for help with grammar, punctuation, footnote form, abbreviations, etc.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2010.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Rev. by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Alexander, Patrick H., et al., eds. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.

Closely examine your work several times, paying attention to:

1. *Structure and Argument*. Do I state my question and thesis accurately? Does my paper do what my Introduction promised? (If not, adjust one or the other.) Do I argue my thesis well? Do the headings clearly guide the reader through my outline and argument? Does this sequence of topics orchestrate the insights my reader needs to understand my thesis?

2. *Style*. Style here refers to writing patterns that enliven prose and engage the reader. Three simple ways to strengthen your academic prose are:

*Topic sentences. Be sure each paragraph clearly states its main assertion.

*Active verbs. As much as possible, avoid using the linking verb, to be. Rephrase using active verbs.

*Sentence flow. Above all, look for awkward sentences in your draft. Disentangle and rework them into smooth, clear sequences. To avoid boring the reader, vary the length and form of your sentences. Check to see if your paragraphs unfold with some short sentences, questions, and simple declarative ones.

Likewise, tackle some barbarisms that frequently invade academic prose:

*Repetition. Unless you need the word count, this can go.

*Unnecessary words. Need we say more? Such filler as “That fact that” and “in order to” and “There is/are” numb your reader. Similarly, such qualifiers as “somewhat,” “fairly,” “rather,” “very” take the wind from the adjective that follows.

*Jargon. Avoid technical terms when possible. Explain all technical terms that you do use. Avoid or translate foreign-language terms.

*Overly complex sentences. Short sentences are best. Avoid compound-complex sentences and run-on sentences.

3. *Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation*. Along with typographical errors, look for stealth errors, the common but overlooked grammatical gaffes: subject-verb disagreement, dangling participles, mixed verb tenses, over- and under-use of commas, semicolon use, and inconsistency in

capitalization, hyphenation, italicization, or treatment of numbers. Miriam-Webster Online contains both the *Collegiate Dictionary* and *Thesaurus*: www.mw.com/.

4. *Footnotes*. Your footnotes will give credit to your sources for every quote and for other people's ideas you have used. Here are samples of typical citation formats in Modern Language Association style:

Basic order:

Author's full name, Book Title, ed., trans., series, edition, vol. number (Place: Publisher, year), pages.

Book:

Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

Book in a series:

Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics, Theology and the Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), ch. 3.

Edited book:

Hershel Shanks and Dan Cole, eds., *Archaeology and the Bible: The Best of BAR: Archaeology in the World of Herod, Jesus and Paul* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1990), 129-55.

Essay or chapter in an edited book:

Rebecca Goldstein, "Looking Back at Lot's Wife," *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel, eds. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 3-12.

Multi-volume work:

Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Hope," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 250.

Journal article:

Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis and the End of Jewish Sectarianism." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27-53

Encyclopedia article:

Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 279-288.

Unsigned encyclopedia article:

"Tyre," *Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, CD ROM (Microsoft Systems, 1998).

Website source:

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "On Same-Sex Marriages," *Origins* 26:132-33.

CD-ROM source:

Helmar Junghans, *Martin Luther: Exploring His Life and Times, 1483-1546*, CD-ROM (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

Bible:

Cite in your text (not in your footnotes) by book, chapter, and verse: Gen 1:1-2; Exod 7:13; Rom 5:1-8. In your bibliography list the version of Bible you have used.

Repeated citations:

If a footnote cites the immediately preceding source, use *ibidem*, meaning “there,” abbreviated:

61. *Ibid.*, 39.

Sources cited earlier can be referred to by author or editor’s names, a shorter title, and page number:

62. Scheindlin, *History*, 42.

5. *Bibliography*. Your bibliography can be any of several types:

*Works Cited: just the works – books, articles, etc. – that appear in your footnotes.

*Works Consulted: all the works you checked in your research, whether they were cited or not in the final draft.

*Select Bibliography: primary and secondary works that, in your judgment, are the most important source materials on this topic, whether cited or not in your footnotes.

Some teachers might ask for your bibliographic entries to be annotated, i.e., to include a comment from you on the content, import, approach, and helpfulness of each work.

Bibliographic style differs somewhat from footnote style. Here are samples of typical bibliographic formats in MLA style.

Basic order: Author’s last name, first name and initial. Book Title. Ed. Trans. Series. Edition. Vol. Place: Publisher, Year.

Book:

Scheindlin, Raymond P. *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Book in a series:

Worthing, Mark William. *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics. Theology and the Sciences*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Edited book:

Shanks, Hershel, and Cole, Dan, eds. *Archaeology and the Bible: The Best of BAR: Archaeology in the World of Herod, Jesus and Paul*. Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1990.

Essay or chapter in an edited book:

Goldstein, Rebecca. "Looking Back at Lot's Wife." In *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*. Eds. Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.

Multi-volume work:

Rahner, Karl. "On the Theology of Hope." In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10. New York: Herder and Herder, 1973.

Journal article:

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Encyclopedia article:

Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Ed. David Noel Freedman. Vol. 2. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

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"Tyre." *Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*. CD ROM. Microsoft Systems, 1998.

Website source:

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CD-ROM source:

Helmar Junghans. *Martin Luther: Exploring His Life and Times, 1483-1546*. CD-ROM. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Bible:

The Jewish Study Bible featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation. Eds. Adele Berlin, Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.