

Gary A. Rendsburg

October – November 2021

Thursday, October 14, 2021

Dear Friends:

As indicated in the last email blast (sent on September 6th), we have been busy during the past month with the start of the academic year and the observance of the Jewish holidays (Rosh ha-Shana / Yom Kippur / Sukkot).

Gary is thoroughly enjoying the teaching of his three courses:

- The English Bible
- Hieroglyphic Egyptian I
- Intro to Bible I (Torah and Prose)

See Gary's Corner below for a few reflections.

Online article published at TheTorah.com

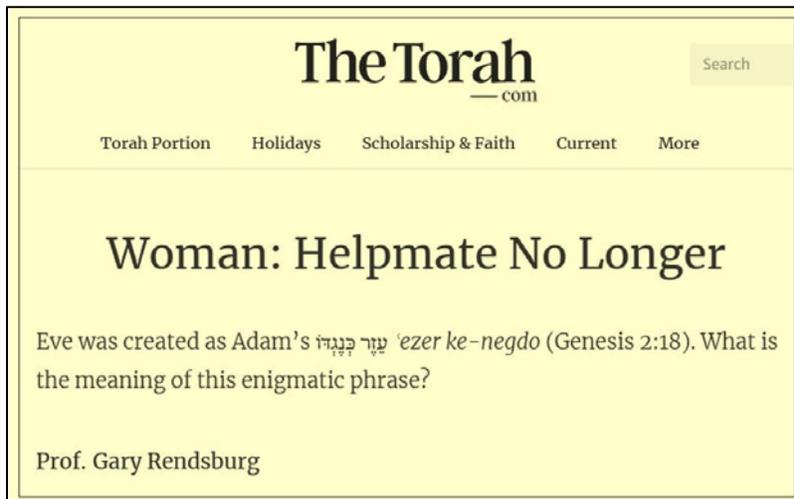
If you have not yet discovered TheTorah.com, we invite you to peruse the website, which brings the best of modern biblical scholarship to a general reading audience.

Gary contributed a recent essay, related to Parashat Bereshit, which was read in synagogues around the world on Saturday, October 2, with a special focus on the much-discussed phrase *'ezer ke-negdo* (Genesis 2:18, 2:20).

The phrase was famously rendered by the King James Version (1611) as “an helpe meet for him,” which in turn influenced generations of readers, as the key term morphed into English “helpmate.”

Gary’s essay challenges that understanding of the phrase; see here for the complete discussion:

<https://www.thetorah.com/article/woman-helpmate-no-longer>



Upcoming Public Lectures

October 27th

“Judaic Treasures of the Bodleian Library (Oxford)”

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

11:00 a.m. (EDT)

Presented by Jewish Historical Seminars (Jerusalem) – via Zoom

<https://www.jewishhistoricalseminars.com/lectures>

In order to register, please pay \$12.00 via PayPal at: [Paypal.Me/JHSeminars](https://www.paypal.com/US/merchorder/jhs).

And then email Debbie Zuberi at: JHS@JewishHistoricalSeminars.com

Description:

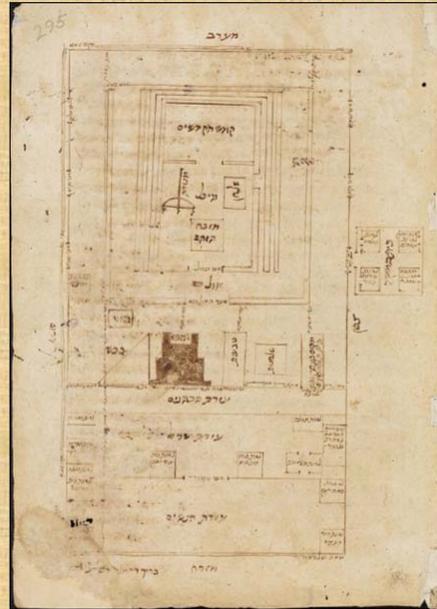
Simply stated, the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford has the greatest collection of Hebrew manuscripts in the world. Star attractions include: Maimonides’s own handwritten copy of his Commentary on the Mishna; his personal copy (written by a trusted scribe) of his Mishneh Torah (Code of Jewish Law); and the Kennicott Bible, written in Spain in 1476, the crown jewel of all medieval Jewish manuscripts. The lecture will trace the history of the Judaica collection, starting with Thomas Bodley (1545–1613) himself, founder of the library, advisor to Queen Elizabeth, and accomplished Hebraist.

We also will discuss the remarkable work and distinguished careers of John Selden, Edward Pococke, and Robert Huntington, three important 17th English scholars, with the latter two having traveled widely in the Middle East, from their base in Aleppo. Gary Rendsburg has lived in Oxford and has conducted academic research at the Bodleian Library. Join us as he brings the verve and culture of the library to life, with both serious history teaching and a pleasant dose of Anglophilia.

Judaic Treasures of the Bodleian Library (Oxford)

Gary A. Rendsburg
Blanche and Irving Laurie
Chair in Jewish History
Rutgers University
October 27, 2021

Jewish Historical Seminars



Maimonides's own hand-drawn layout of the Temple, from his Commentary on the Mishna (Bodleian MS Pococke 295, fol. 295r)

November 7th

“The Jews of Medieval England (1066 – 1290)”

Sunday, November 7, 2021

10:00 a.m. (EST)

Presented by Temple Beth-El (Somerset, N.J.), both in-person and via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5906257764?pwd=c0dneW11alZsemQvVXlLQUY1bUt6UT09>

Gary is especially excited to return to in-person lecturing, after a hiatus of 21 months. That’s right, his last in-person presentations were in February 2020, just before the world shut down due to the pandemic.

But the time is ripe for engagement with an in-person audience, and thus one of our local synagogues reached out to Gary to present to the congregation on November 7th – especially since the State of New Jersey allows for indoor gatherings, with everyone masked, vaccinated, and socially distanced.

As indicated above, however, Temple Beth-El also will live stream the event via its Zoom channel:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5906257764?pwd=c0dneW11alZsemQvVXlLQUY1bUt6UT09>

If you are local and wish to attend, please be in touch with Marc Hilton at marchilt@aol.com.

If you wish to connect remotely, there is no need to register, simply join via the above Zoom link at the appointed time.

Description:

Jews first arrived in England upon the invitation of William the Conqueror, soon after 1066. For the next 200-plus years, they both prospered and endured harsh treatment under the realm of Christendom. This lecture will survey both ends of the spectrum.

Among the former highlights is the life and career of the financier Aaron of Lincoln, whose wealth was instrumental in the construction of Lincoln Cathedral during the 12th century (then the tallest building in the world), and the deed recording the sale of land by Jacob the Jew to Walter de Merton for the establishment of Merton College, Oxford (where J. R. R. Tolkien would teach centuries later).

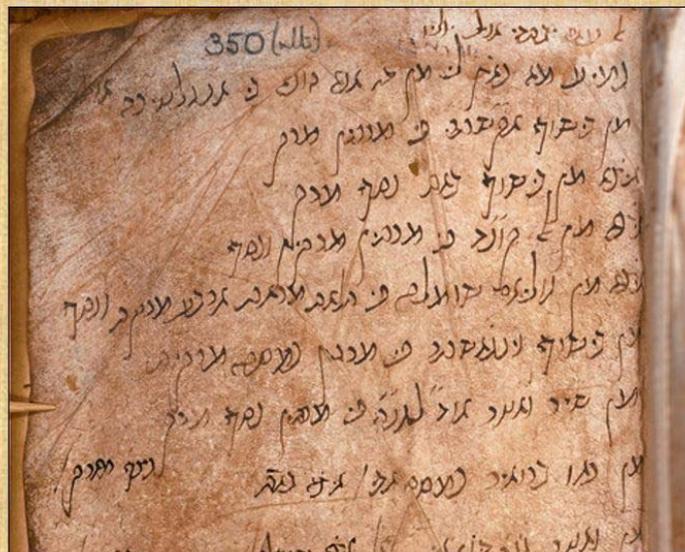
Among the latter lowlights is the evidence for the first blood libel in Norwich in 1144, the massacre at York in 1190, and eventually the expulsion of the Jews under Edward I in 1290.

The Jews of Medieval England

Gary A. Rendsburg
Blanche and Irving Laurie
Chair in Jewish History
Rutgers University

Temple Beth-El
Somerset, N.J.

November 7, 2021



November 30th

“Jewish Life in the Middle Ages: In the Shadow of Islam and Christendom”

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

6:30 p.m. (EST)

Smithsonian Associates (Washington, D.C.)

<https://smithsonianassociates.org/ticketing/tickets/jewish-life-in-middle-ages-in-shadow-of-islam-and-christendom>

Description:

Almost without exception, throughout the Middle Ages, the vast majority of Jews lived under either Islamic rule or Christian rule. Under caliphate rule across North Africa and the Middle East, Jews flourished in vibrant and cosmopolitan cities such as Cairo and Baghdad. They established long-range trade routes as far east as India and China, bringing wealth and prestige to their communities.

In contrast, life in Christian Europe was fraught with challenges, as the Church’s negative attitude towards the Jews prevented their full integration into society. They suffered accusations of ritual murder and host desecration, slaughter at the hands of the Crusaders, and expulsions from England, France, and Spain. Despite all this, some European Jews were able to establish relatively productive lives.

Historian Gary Rendsburg explores Jewish life within these two orbits. He focuses on how the Jews survived during the Middle Ages, the period that bridges their historical roots in the land of Israel, and the dawn of modernity brought on by the Renaissance.

Jewish Life in the Middle Ages: In the Shadow of Islam and Christendom



The Jewish Cemetery in Worms, Germany,
with its earliest graves dating to the 11th century

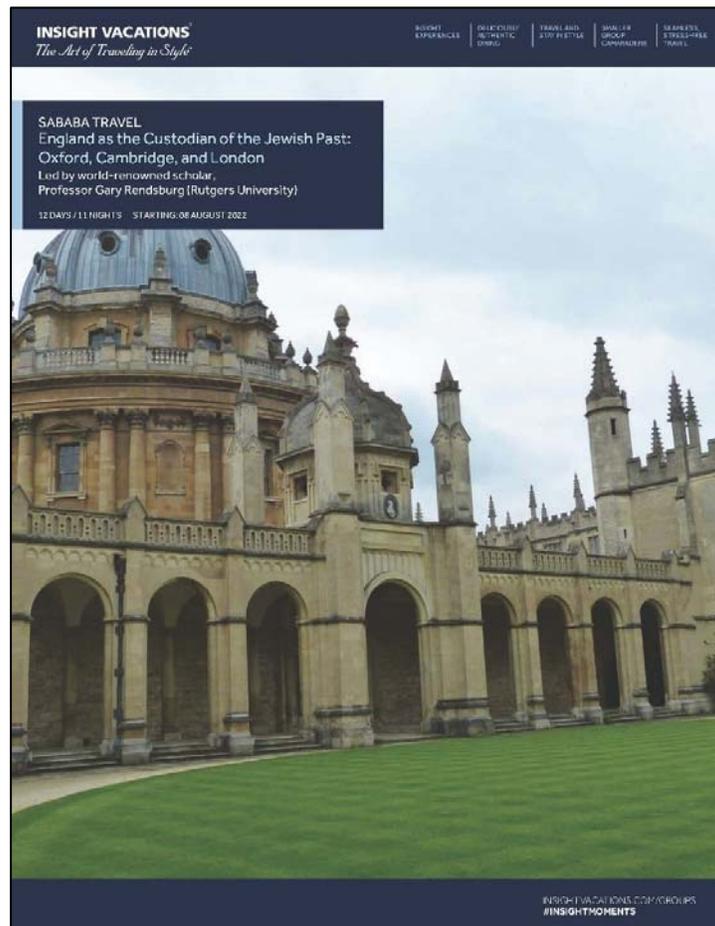
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Special Study Tour: “England as the Custodian of the Jewish Past” (August 2022)

As announced in a previous email, Gary will lead a special study tour of Oxford, Cambridge, and London, with access to the Hebrew manuscript collections at the Bodleian Library (Oxford) and the Cambridge University Library (C.U.L.) in August 2022.

The complete itinerary and pricing will be announced soon by Sababa Travel (Westfield, N.J.), so please stay tuned for a special announcement about the tour.





GARY'S CORNER



All I can say is: it is so good to be back in the classroom with our wonderful Rutgers students!

1. Of the three courses that I am teaching, as you can imagine, “Intro to Bible I (Torah and Prose)” is part of my normal repertoire – so not much to report there, other than the fact that the students are totally engaged and are enjoying our literary reading of familiar stories (Creation, Abraham, etc.).
2. As to the second course, “Hieroglyphic Egyptian I” (the first semester of a two-semester sequence): I offered the course on numerous occasions during my years of teaching at Cornell (1986–2004), but this is the first time that I have taught the course since arriving at Rutgers in 2004. I am not sure what took me so long to add the course to our curriculum, but I am so glad that I did. As far as we can tell, this is the first time in the 255-year history of our institution that Hieroglyphic Egyptian has been taught!

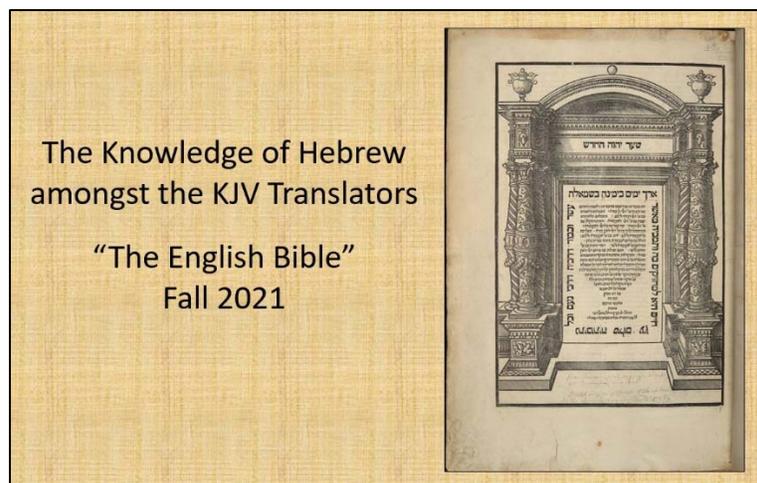
The students are progressing well, as they now can read and translate complete sentences after only five weeks of instruction. They build their vocabulary and learn more grammar with each session – while their instructor loves every minute!

3. The third course, “The English Bible,” also is a new course, which I am co-teaching with my colleague Tom Fulton in the English Department, with a special focus on the King James Version (1611).

To give you one sense of the flow of the course, last week, I presented a PowerPoint lecture on “The Knowledge of Hebrew amongst the KJV Translators.”

The key question is: so if there were no Jews in England during the years 1290–1656, how did all the KJV scholars and translators learn Hebrew in order to produce and publish their glorious work in the year 1611?

I thoroughly enjoyed gathering all the information and creating the narrative for the students, as we traced the lives of these remarkable individuals, the books at their disposal, the libraries available to them, and their excellent knowledge of Hebrew texts, not only the Bible per se, but also the medieval Jewish commentators such as Rashi and Abraham ibn Ezra.



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Gary A. Rendsburg Lecture Series

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Department of Jewish Studies – Rutgers University

<https://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/people/core-faculty/gary-a-rendsborg>