

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## **Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law**

This book presents a new framework for understanding the relationship between biblical narrative and rabbinic law. Drawing on legal theory and models of rabbinic exegesis, Jane L. Kanarek argues for the centrality of biblical narrative in the formation of rabbinic law. Through close readings of selected Talmudic and midrashic texts, Kanarek demonstrates that rabbinic legal readings of narrative scripture are best understood through the framework of a referential exegetical web. She shows that law should be viewed both as prescriptive of normative behavior and as a meaning-making enterprise. By explicating the hermeneutical processes through which biblical narratives become resources for legal norms, this book transforms our understanding of the relationship of law and narrative and of the ways in which scripture becomes a rabbinic document that conveys legal authority and meaning.

Jane L. Kanarek is Assistant Professor of Rabbinitics at Hebrew College. She earned her PhD from the University of Chicago, her MA from the Jewish Theological Seminary, and her AB from Brown University.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

JANE L. KANAREK

*Hebrew College*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law  
 Jane L. Kanarek  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107047815](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107047815)

© Jane L. Kanarek 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Kanarek, Jane L.

Biblical narrative and the formation of rabbinic law / Jane L. Kanarek.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-04781-5 (hardback)

1. Narration in the Bible. 2. Bible. Pentateuch – Criticism, Narrative.

3. Rabbinical literature – History and criticism. I. Title.

BS521.7.K36 2014

296.1'206-dc23 2014001781

ISBN 978-1-107-04781-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For my grandparents, זכרונם לברכה,*

*Molly and Maurice Kanarek*

*Dorothy and Michael Kriseman*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
1. Introduction: Law, Narrative, and Exegesis	I
2. Abraham's Knife	31
3. Rebekah's Betrothal	67
4. Joseph's Mourning	106
5. An Assembly of Ten	139
6. Conclusion	174
<i>Bibliography</i>	185
<i>Index of Primary Sources</i>	201
<i>Subject Index</i>	207

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Acknowledgments

Writing a book is joyous, difficult, and time-consuming. I would like to thank the many people who have been a part of this project: teachers, colleagues, friends, and family. First, I would like to thank Michael Fishbane, my dissertation advisor at the University of Chicago. Dr. Fishbane spent an immense amount of time talking with me in his office, constantly pushing me to articulate my scholarly voice and encouraging me to read more than what I had thought possible from these rabbinic texts. I am grateful for his guidance in the writing of my dissertation and in what it means to turn a dissertation into a book. Dr. Fishbane continues to be a model of rigorous and theologically engaged scholarship. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Richard Rosengarten and Alyssa Gray. Dr. Rosengarten spent a year reading legal theory and hermeneutics with me in preparation for my qualifying exams, a year of thinking that was crucial to the formation of my ideas about law and narrative. Dr. Gray helped guide me through the intricacies of the Yerushalmi, Bavli, and Genesis Rabbah. The rigor of her scholarship remains a benchmark. At the University of Chicago, I would also like to thank Winnifred Sullivan for her superb class, Religion, Law, and Culture, and for introducing me to the work of James Boyd White. The Wexner Graduate Fellowship provided generous

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

financial support, an inspiring group of academic colleagues, and ready mentorship. The Shalom Hartman Traveling Fellowship of the University of Chicago Divinity School enabled me to spend a year studying in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University. There I would particularly like to thank David Rosenthal for the generous time he spent discussing my dissertation ideas and for his seminar on the redaction of the Bavli. In addition, I want to thank Gordon Tucker for first introducing me to “Nomos and Narrative” at Camp Ramah in New England when I was still a rabbinical student.

I began to teach at the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College while completing my dissertation. It has proven to be a rich environment in which to teach and to write. I am lucky to be surrounded by wonderful colleagues and students. The expertise of my colleagues in a range of Jewish literatures continues to astound me. My students challenge me to find ways to bring them into the ancient world of rabbinic literature and to build bridges between it and their work with today’s Jewish communities. Harvey Sukenic, the Library Director at Hebrew College, was invaluable in my research, helping me locate many books that were not easily available. Ebn Leader discussed a number of difficult sugyot with me. Sara Zacharia provided friendship and constant encouragement. I also particularly want to thank Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Arthur Green, Daniel Lehmann, and Barry Mesch for their support of my research. In an environment where teaching is prized, I am grateful to them for enabling me to carve out time to write.

I also benefited from the comments and advice of a number of colleagues and friends. Jonathan Klawans and Jeffrey Rubenstein provided me with valuable and generous feedback on my dissertation. My writing group of Rachel Greenblatt, Gregg Gardner, Yehuda Kurtzer, Ed Silver, and Claire Sufrin read early versions of chapters of this book and offered sharp criticism that helped me refine my thinking. Ed Silver has been a friend and partner in academic dialogue since our time as students at the University of Chicago. Beth Berkowitz also read chapters

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xi

of this book and provided me with important comments that sharpened my arguments. Gail Labovitz answered questions about the Yerushalmi and mourning practices. Conversations with Yoni Pomeranz about my dissertation and ideas for the book pushed me to crystallize my thinking further. I thank him for his questions and his friendship. Marjorie Lehman closely read the entire manuscript, giving me invaluable advice on the importance of context. I am deeply grateful for her friendship, support, and wisdom. Sylvia Fuks Fried provided generous counsel on the publishing process. During different stays in Jerusalem, Pinchas Roth answered numerous questions about manuscripts, bibliography, and the Hebrew University Talmud Department. Mordechai Silverstein sent me bibliographic references and ideas for sources. I also want to thank them for their friendship. Ronit and Shimon Irshai opened their Jerusalem home to me during a sabbatical, providing me with warm friendship and conversations about Talmud, legal theory, and gender. Judith Kates and Jon Levisohn were wonderful *hevrutot*, partners in study. I also want to thank Gwynn Kessler and Rachel Neis for their friendship and wisdom.

Lewis Bateman and Shaun T. Vigil of Cambridge University Press have been supportive throughout this process. I particularly want to thank the two anonymous readers whose insightful comments have made this book a much better work. Thanks are also due to Sharon Liberman-Mintz and Jerry Schwarzbard at the Jewish Theological Seminary for their help with the cover image and Adam Parker for the index. Chapter 2 was first published in an earlier version in *AJS Review* as “He Took the Knife: Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law.” I appreciatively acknowledge permission to reprint.

Finally, I thank my family. I grew up in a home filled with books, and my parents, Anna and David Kanarek, taught me a love of reading from a young age – something that they learned from their parents. They also taught me the importance of having work that I love. Luckily, I listened to them, and I have found work that I love and that requires me to read. My brothers,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04781-5 - Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law

Jane L. Kanarek

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xii

*Acknowledgments*

Denzil and Andrew, challenged me in numerous dinner debates to always make my arguments a little better. My grandparents, each in their own way, taught me the importance of trying to live by my beliefs. Most of all, I thank my husband Andrew Halpert and our sons Lev and Tal. Together, you have made my life richer than I could ever have imagined. I am grateful.