

Genesis Parables
JST 160
American Jewish University Campus in Israel
Young Judaea Year Course

The book of Genesis describes the creation of the world and first archetypal relationships of humanity. The biblical narrative offers a rich source to explore universal themes, societal legends, and personal questions. This course is based upon an in-depth textual analysis of thematic passages, beginning with a simple reading of the text and progressing to larger, more complex comprehension of the subject.

The goal of this course is for students to build upon their previous knowledge of the text through a greater familiarity with commentators, both traditional and modern. The course seeks to strengthen tools and interest for further self-study. Students will examine moral issues and biblical personalities as they impact on current religious thinking and Jewish identity.

Students will be assessed according to four measurements: attendance and participation (10%), homework and quizzes (15%), midterm (35%), and a final paper (40%). At the middle and end of the course, students will be given a passage not covered in class studies and be asked to write a coherent analysis of the text using the devices presented throughout the course.

Course Outline

- I. Introduction – Meetings 1-2
 - a. Who wrote the biblical criticism?
Friedman, Richard Elliott. Who Wrote the Bible? .
Fruendel, Barry. Contemporary Orthodox Judaism's Response to Modernity.
 - b. Pardes and Parshiyot
Leibtag, Menachem
 - c. Outlining methods of study for the course
Homework: Become familiar with the first five chapters of Breisheet

- II. Why the Torah begins with a creation story.
 - a. Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam and the Radak.
 - b. Sarna's Understand Genesis use of context for clarity
Homework: Read Jonathan Sacks' Faith Lecture

- III. Creation and the People in Eden
 - a. Adam I, Adam II, Eve, Cain and Abel
Rashi, Ramban, the Kuzari, and Professor Y. Leibowitz

Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg from Genesis: The Beginning of Desire
Homework: Read and be familiar with Breishet 6-10

IV. The Story and History of the flood

- a. Chiastic structure in the Bible
Nehama Leibowitz's commentary p.67-78:
- a. Contrast to Gilgamesh
Sarna p.41-51
- c. Discuss verse 8:21 and the existence of evil in the world
Homework: Read and be familiar with Breishet 11 and 12

V. Bavel and the origins of Abraham

- a. Comparison of the Flood and Tower generations
- b. How and why Abraham gets the 'call'
Steinsaltz's Biblical Images p. 13-19

Homework: read Breishet 13-19

VI. Abraham the boundary crosser

- a. Brit Mila. defending Lot, hospitality, arguing for Sodom
Ramban vs. Rashi on Lech Lecha
Rabbi Belovski p 31-34 on Gd's play of Sodom
Homework: Read and be familiar with Breishet 20-22

VII. The binding of Isaac – Did Avraham pass the test?

- a. The Akeidah
Rambam Moreh Nevuchim (3:24) and Zornberg p. 97-122
- b. From "Lech Lecha" to "Lech Lecah"; Y. Leibowitz
Steinsaltz's Biblical Images p. 31-38
Homework: read Breishet 25-28

Midterm: unseen examination

VIII. Isaac's malaise and Rebecca's power

- a. "Bracha" vs. "Beichera"
Menahem Leibtag's approach
- b. Post-traumatic stress disorder and the metaphor of blindness
- c. Rebecca as the opposite of Isaac, Steinsaltz p.43

Homework: Read Breisheet 28-33

IX. "Yakov Livado": From Beit El to the Jabok River

- a. Wrestling with angles
Ramban vs. Ramban. Sarna p. 202-206
- b. Avoiding conflict, taking a vow, and uncertain futures
N. Leibowitz
- c. The meaning of a new name; contrast to Abraham.
Midrash Hagadol and Rashi
Homework: Read Breishet 32-37

- X. Jacob's return to Israel; a Prelude to exile
- a. Facing Esau, Schem, death, and his quest for peace
Menahem Leibtag
 - b. Expounding "Viyeshv"
Zornberg, and Y. Leibowitz
- Homework: Read Breisheet 37-41
- XI. Joseph's Dreams and Being "Sold Out" by his Brothers
- a. Providence and free choice in the sale
Rashi, Ramban, and the Ibn Ezra
 - b. Joseph as a Tzadik
Steinsaltz p 63-71 and N. Leibowitz 430-438
- XII. The end of Jacobs life- success or failure?
- a. The end being the beginning
Zorenberg p.352.283
 - b. "Truth Gives way to Peace"
N. Leibowitz p.563-568
- FINAL ASSESSMENT HANDED OUT

Bibliography

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Belovski, Zvi. Shem Mishmuel. Israel: Targum/Feldheim, 1997.

Bialik, Hayim Nahman, and Yehoshua Hana Ravintzky. The Book of Legends (Sefer Aggadah). New York: Schocken Books, 1952.

Chavel, Charles B, ed. Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on the Torah. New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc. 1971.

Chumash Torah Chaim. Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1986

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Leibowitz, Nehama. Studies in Breshit (Genesis). Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1973.

Leibowitz, Yeshayahu. Notes to the Weekly Tora Readings. Jerusalem: Academon – The Hebrew University Student’s Printing and Publishing House. 1988.

Leibtag, Menachem. Tanach Study Center. 27 July 2004. < <http://www.tanach.org/breishit/brintro/brintro1.htm>>.

Peters, Simi. Learning to Read Midrash. New York: Urim Publications, 2004

Sacks, Jonathan. “Revelation – Torah from Heaven.” 26 March 2001. Faith Lecture Series. < <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/ft-index.html>> 3 August 2004.

Sarna, Nahum M. Understanding Genesis. New York: Schocken Books, 1966.

Steinsaltz, Adin. Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984.

Zion, Tanya, ed. Stories of Our Beginnings: Conversations About Human Relations. A Dialogue with the Book of Genesis. Israel: Yediot Ahronot, 2002.

Traditional Commentators used throughout course:

Arbarbanel (1437-1508), Cassuto (1883-1951), Ibn Ezra (b 1092), Rabbi Shimshon Rapahel Hirsch (1808-1888), Hizkuni (1524), Kli Yakar (1550-1619), Rav Avraham Issac Hakoken Kook (1865-1935), Malbim (1809-1880), Radak (1160-1236), Rambam (1135-1204), Ramban (1194-1270), Rashbam (1080-1158), Rashi (1040-1105), Sforno (1475-1550) and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1080-1142?).