

Course Name and Number:

**The books of the Bible** - Dr. Zvi Shimon

01-002-80/81

**Type of course:** Lecture

**Year of Studies:**2015-2016 **Semester:** Fall  **Hours/credits:** 2

**Course Description:**

The course will explore the first half of the book of Genesis. The narratives which will be analyzed – The Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, The Flood, The Tower of Babel – are amongst the most famous stories in the Bible as well as in world literature. The narratives will be examined from a modern literary perspective and in light of their Ancient Near Eastern background. Our examination will emphasize the methodological differences between varying exegetical approaches such as midrash, medieval Jewish exegesis and modern literary methods. We will examine the structure of the book of Genesis and of the individual narratives and emphasize literary features such as chiastic structure, wordplay and contrast and the relationship between the literary form of the narratives and their meaning. Our investigation will relate to important exegetical questions such as the significance of the different divine names and the contradictions between the varying accounts of creation. Using modern philological, literary and analytical tools, we will appreciate the beauty, complexity and the theological message behind the ancient narratives.

**Detailed Lesson plan:**

1. Genesis 1–3: The Creation Stories

The structure of chapter 1 and its significance. Opposites in creation. Poetry and Prose within the narrative. The biblical perspective on creation in comparison to Ancient Near Eastern mythology.

The Story of the Garden of Eden and the debate revolving allegorical interpretation – Rasag in comparison to other approaches. The uniqueness of the Eden narrative and a suggestion for a new allegorical interpretation.

The two creation stories: similarities and differences. Different exegetical approaches to the contradictions. Midrashic interpretation in contrast to Rav Breuer, Rav Soloveitchik, Robert Alter and modern literary approaches.

2. Genesis 3–5: Cain and Abel and their descendants

The conflict between brothers motif and the preference of the younger over the firstborn. Literary features: contrast, asymmetry and key–word. The descendants of Cain and Abel and the function of genealogical lists in Genesis.

3. Genesis 6–11: From Noach to Abraham

The structure of the flood narrative and its significance. Comparison between the biblical flood narrative and Ancient Near Eastern parallels. Different approaches to Cham's sin and the curse of Canaan. The Tower of Babel story, chiastic structure, wordplay and satire in the Bible. The message of the Tower of Babel story accordind to derash and according to peshat.

# Select Bibliography

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