

Date:Sep. 2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

**Biblical Topics: Modern Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narratives**

**Dr. Zvi Shimon|** **Basic Jewish Studies Department**0101080/81

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| **Course Type:** | Lectuer |
| **Scope of credits:** | 2  |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Semester:** | Spring |
| **Day & Time:** | Tuesday 9-10:30 |
| **Reception Time:** | Tuesday 11:45 |
| **Lecturer Email:** | zvi.shimon@biu.ac.il |
| **Moodle Site:** | https://lemida.biu.ac.il/course/view.php?id=96024 |

**Course description and learning goals**

**Course Abstract**

The course explores the Abraham cycle of narratives (Gen. 11:27- 25) with a focus on the Abraham-Lot narrative. The narratives will be examined from a modern literary perspective and in light of their Ancient Near Eastern background.

**Learning objectives**

**Knowledge, Skills and Values**

Learners will:

Know the contents of the Abraham narratives.

Understand the central ideas underlying the Abraham narratives.

Appreciate the literary design of the Abraham narratives.

Understand the character design of Abraham and the literary role of Lot.

Grapple with the Chosen Peoples ideology of the narratives.

Get acquainted with middle age and modern interpretations of the narratives.

Appreciate the of biblical rhetoric.

Understand the religious ideology behind the Abraham narratives.

Appreciate the complexity and sophistication of the Abraham narratives.

**Active learning –** **lessons plan:**

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| Lesson No. | Topic | Active learning | Required reading | Assessment  |
| 1 | Introduction to the Abraham cycle of narratives. Boundaries of the cycle, structure and central topics of the cycle. The idea behind a chosen nation. | Guided Reading | Gen. 11-12, 25 |  |
| 2-3 | Terah's journey and Abram's journey. | Comparative Reading | Genesis 11:27-32, 12:1-5Shimon Z.,"Distinguishing Abraham from the "Terahides": Ideology of Separation behind Etiology,"in *Doubling and Duplicating in Genesis,* ed. Elizabeth Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 2016, 129-142 |  |
| 4 | The command of לך לך. Interpretation of מולדתך- Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and modern commentators. Verboseness of the command and its significance. | Group "chavruta" learning | Source sheet with commentaries of Rashi, Nachmanides and Ibn Ezra |  |
| 5 | Abram's descent to Egypt. Different evaluations of Abram's behavior. Ramban's approach and the idea of מעשה אבות סימן לבנים. | Class discussion and poll | Gen. 12:10-20, Nachmanides on Gen. 12:10 |  |
| 6 | Separation of Abram and Lot. Contrasting Abram and Lot. | Guided reading and filling out table | Gen. 13, Coats G.W., “Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga”, in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernard W. Anderson* (ed. J.T. Butler, E.W. Conrad & B.C. Ollenburger, JSOTSS 37), Sheffield 1985, pp. 113-132 | Mid-semester Quiz |
| 7-8 | The War of the Four Kings against the Five and its contribution to the Abraham and Lot narratives. The role of Melchizedek in the narrative. God's role in the victory. Comparing chapters 13 and 14. | Group Reading together | Shimon Z.*“*What is Melchizedek the King-Priest Doing in the Abraham Narrative?”in *Ve-‘Ed Ya’aleh (Gen 2:6): Essays in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Edward L. Greenstein,* ed. Peter Machinist, Robert Harris, et. al., (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns(, 2021, 611- 626 |  |
| 9 | Overview structure of ch. 18-19. | Independent Reading | Gen. 18-19 overview reading |  |
| 10 | The angels visiting Abraham. Motif of hosting by a childless couple and reward of a son. Theophany revealing regarding Sodom. Abraham's intent in his response | Class discussion | Gen. 18 close reading |  |
| 11 | The destruction of Sodom (ch. 19). The nature of the sin of Sodom. | Joint class reading | Gen. 19 close reading |  |
| 12 | Evaluating Lot's character. Ch. 18 and 19 as parallel stories. Analogy and contrast in comparing Abraham and Lot. | Class discussion and poll | Turner L.A., “Lot as Jekyll and Hyde”, in *The Bible in Three Dimensions* (eds. D.J.A. Clines, S.E. Fowl & S.E. Porter, JSOTSS 87), Sheffield 1990, pp. 85- 101 |  |
| 13 | Summary towards exam |  |  |  |

(In a course that lasts a whole year, the additional sessions should be added)

\* There may be changes in the syllabus depending on learning progress and effectiveness

**Final grade**

**Components of the score:** 50% final exam, 50% attendance and participation

**Course** requirements

80% attendance with a Bible and participation

 **Prerequisites**

Basic Hebrew reading and comprehension skills.



**Bibliography: Up-to-date** **reading, viewing, and listening content items**

Required content

See required reading by lesson delineated is lesson plan

Recommended content

Alexander T.D., “Lot’s Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness”, *JBL* 104 (1985), pp.289- 291

Alexander T.D., *A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis*(Diss.), University of Belfast 1982

Coats G.W., “Lot: A foil in the Abraham Saga”, in *Understanding the Word* (JSOSS 37), eds. J.T. Butler et al., Sheffield 1985, pp. 113–132

Emerton J.A., "The Riddle of Genesis XIV", *VT* 21 (1971), pp. 403- 439

Jeansonne S.P., “The Characterization of Lot in Genesis”, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18 (1988), pp. 123-129

Gottlieb I.B., “Light and Darkness in Perpetual Round: Genesis 18 and 19”, in**באורח מדע: מחקרים בתרבות ישראל מוגשים לאהרן מירסקי במלאות לו שבעים שנה** (ערך צבי מלאכי), לוד תשמ"ו, pp. 181-198

Muffs Y., "Abraham the Noble Warrior: Patriarchal Politics and Laws of War in Ancient Israel", *JJS* 33(1982), pp. 81- 107

Wenham G.J., *Genesis 16-50* (WBC), Waco, Texas 1994

Zakovitch Y., "Juxtaposition in the Abraham Cycle", in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman and A. Hurvitz), Winona Lake, Indiana 1995, pp. 509-524

סימון א', "אברהם המקראי – ברכת הניגודים", בתוך **אברהם אבי המאמינים: דמותו בראי ההגות לדורותיה** (ערכו מ' חלמיש, ח' כשר וי' סילמן), רמת-גן תשס"ב, עמ' 41- 46

קיל י', **ספר בראשית: פרשיות בראשית–לך לך** **(דעת מקרא)**, ירושלים 1997

קיל י', **ספר בראשית: פרשיות וירא–וישלח** **(דעת מקרא)**, ירושלים 2000