

Date:1/09/2025\_\_\_\_

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

**Genesis: Modern Literary Analysis**

**Dr. Zvi Shimon|** **Basic Jewish Studies Department**01-002-80/81

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| **Course Type:** | Class |
| **Scope of credits:** | 2 credits |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Semester:** | Fall |
| **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=93015 |

**Course description and learning goals**

**Course Abstract**

The course will explore the first chapters of the book of Genesis known as the primordial history. The narratives will be examined from a modern literary perspective and in light of their ancient Near Eastern background. The emphasis will be on appreciating the artistic design of the stories and understanding the structure, ideas and messages behind them. We will apply different approaches to the study of biblical narrative and compare and grapple with both diachronic and synchronic methods.

**Learning objectives**

**Knowledge, Skills and Values**

To know the primordial history as depicted in the Book of Genesis, its narratives and overall structure.

To Appreciate the literary art behind the biblical composition.

To understand the ideologies and messages underlying the narratives.

To be familiar with different exegetical approaches to analyzing the biblical text and compare diachronic and synchronic approaches

To understand the theology behind the biblical narratives.

To understand the relationship between the primordial history and the project of the chosen people.

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

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| Lesson No. | Topic | Active learning | Required reading | Assessment  |
| 1 | Introduction to exegesis: Different methods of interpretation. Determining the boundaries of the opening narrative. Source and logic of the chapter division.  | Active learning: Reading first narrative, determining its boundaries and contemplating the discrepancy between the boundaries and the chapter division. | Gen. 1-3 |  |
| 2 | The Story of the 7 days of Creation. Structural analysis of the story. | Guided reading and analysis |  |  |
| 3 | Sabbath contrasted to the rest of the days. Differentiation between poetry and prose in the Bible. Intertwining of poetry within prose. | Thought provoking question regarding changes in style in the narrative. | Optional: Polak F.H., "Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Gen. 1.1- 2.3)" in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*  (eds. H.G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman, JSOTSS 319), Sheffield 2002, pp. 2- 31 |  |
| 4 | Methodological distinctions between *peshat* and *derash* in the story of creation. Anti-mythological polemics in the creation narrative. | Chavruta learning, discussion and class polls | A source-sheet will be handed out including interpretations of Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Radak. |  |
| 5-6 | The structure of the story of the Garden of Eden and its significance. Chiastic structure as a key to revealing the meaning of the narrative. Measure for measure in the narrative. | Guided reading and filling out table. Class discussion regarding the status of women in biblical perspective in light of the narrative. | Optional: Hauser A.J., "Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation" in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (eds. Clines D.J.A., Gunn D.M. & Hauser A.J., JSOTSS 19), Sheffield 1982, pp. 20-36 | Mid-semester quiz |
| 7 | The polemic regarding allegorical interpretation of the story of the Garden of Eden and a novel interpretation of the story. | Discussion and poll regarding the allegorical approach in interpreting the Bible. | Wenham G.J., “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story”, *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Division A: The Period of the Bible), Jerusalem 1986, pp. 19- 25 |  |
| 8-9 | A comparison between the two creation narratives. Different methodologies for grappling with contradiction. Chazal, Rishonim (Rashi and Radak), biblical criticism, modern literary analysis. Diachronic as opposed to synchronic approaches.  | Source sheet in group chavruta learningand independent Reading | בריואר מ', **פרקי מועדות**, ירושלים תשנ"ג, מבוא, עמ' 14- 16Alter R., *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York 1981, pp. 141- 147Reis P.T., "Genesis as Rashomon: The Creation as Told by God and by Man", *Bible Review* 17 (2001), pp. 26- 33 |  |
| 10 | A comparison between the biblical view of creation and Mesopotamian mythology. | Class discussion | Optional: Frymer-Kensky T., "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Our Understanding of Gen. 1- 9", *BA* 40 (1977), pp. 147- 155 |  |
| 11-12 | Cain and Abel. The biblical motif of the preference of the younger brother. How the narrative builds up the literary tension between the brothers. Derash and Peshat on verse 8.  | Group discussion and participation in poll determining preferred interpretation | Optional: Greenspahn F.E., *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*, NY 1994, pp. 91-92; 132- 133 |  |
| 13 | Literary analogy between the Garden of Eden narrative and the Cain and Abel narrative. The structure behind the first three narratives of the Bible. Summary towards exam | Independent reading and comparison of narratives. |  |  |

(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 Reading**

See also required reading by lesson delineated in lesson plan.

בריואר מ', **פרקי מועדות**, ירושלים תשנ"ג, מבוא, עמ' 14- 16.

Alter R., *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York 1981, pp. 141- 147

Reis P.T., “Genesis as Rashomon: The Creation as Told by God and by Man”, *Bible Review* 17 (2001), pp. 26- 33

Source sheet on Peshat and Drash including the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak on Gen. ch. 1.

Wenham G.J., "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story", *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Division A: The Period of the Bible), Jerusalem 1986, pp. 19- 25

**Additional Reading** (see also in elaborate teaching plan)

ר' סעדיה גאון, **פירוש רב סעדיה גאון לבראשית** (מהדורת צוקר), ניו יורק תדש"ם, עמ' 283- 284

Alter R., *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York 1981

Fokkelman J.P., *Narrative Art in Genesis*, Amsterdam 1975

Fokkelman J.P., "Genesis" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*(ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode), Cambridge, Mass. 1987, pp. 36-55

Frymer-Kensky T., "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Our Understanding of Gen. 1- 9", *BA* 40 (1977), pp. 147- 155

Greenspahn F.E., *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*, NY 1994, pp. 91-92; 132- 133

Hauser A.J., "Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation" in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (eds. Clines D.J.A., Gunn D.M. & Hauser A.J., JSOTSS 19), Sheffield 1982, pp. 20-36

Polak F.H., "Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Gen. 1.1- 2.3)" in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*  (eds. H.G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman, JSOTSS 319), Sheffield 2002, pp. 2- 31

Sternberg M., *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, London 1985

Walsh J.T., "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach" *JBL* 96 (1977), pp. 161-177

Wenham G.J., *Genesis 1–15* (WBC), Waco, Texas 1987