FALL SEMESTER  
*Bereshit (RB-Bible 100)*
Wednesdays and Fridays 11:30 am – 1:00 pm (Beit Midrash Preparation: 9-11:15 am)

**Description**

In this course, we will engage in close readings of selected passages in Genesis (*Bereshit*), with special attention granted to the the matriarchs and patriarchs. We will hone our Hebrew text reading skills, with occasional forays into parallel Ancient Mesopotamian sources. We will also concentrate on Rashi’s commentary and the midrashic sources that he draws upon to familiarize ourselves with classic questions of rabbinic exegesis (*parshanut*). Focus will be on how questions of gender relations – the dynamics of husband/wife and father/mother in relation to their offspring -- have been understood in the past and how we read them through our own contemporary lens.

**Requirements:**

- “Genres and Themes in Biblical Literature” (Bible 502a/502b) or the academic equivalent; Hebrew V or above and/or the approval of the professor.

**Goals of the Course:**

- Reinforce text reading skills of the *Humash* in the original Hebrew, by reviewing some salient features of Biblical Hebrew phonology, morphology, and syntax, and through the usage of the concordance, B.D.B., and grammar resources.

- Review critical approaches to biblical scholarship: Source Criticism (the Documentary Hypothesis), textual criticism, and form criticism. Develop skills to access how *Bereshit* is read in its *sitz im leben* (lit. “setting in life”, i.e. historical context).

- Train ourselves in the distinction between *peshat* (plain meaning, contextual reading) and *derash* (applied or extended meaning of the text), and the tools each level of exegesis requires.

- Learn to read the biblical text carefully, with an eye to discovering the “exegetical
gap” or “hook” upon which the classic interpreter may base his or her reading. We will focus on reading Rashi and his midrashic sources in order to discern “What is Rashi’s question?”

- Introduce students to traditions of interpretation and their respective literary forms: exegetical midrash (e.g. Bereshit Rabbah), the “Re-written Bible” of the Pseudepigrapha (e.g. Jubilees), homiletical midrash (e.g. Tanhuma Yelamdenu), and narrative midrash (e.g. Avot deRabbi Natan, Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer).
- Sensitize ourselves to the literary patterns, feminist perspectives, as well as major themes in the Book of Genesis: covenant, overturn of primogeniture, type scene, barren wife motif and so forth.

**Required Texts:**

- Any Hebrew Bible. Recommended: The bilingual *JPS Tanakh* or the bilingual Koren edition (preferred!).
- *Miqra’ot Gedolot* on Bereshit (including Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra); recommended *Torat Haim* (published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook).
- All other readings will be placed on Reserve in the library and/or uploaded to “Schoology”.

**Course Requirements and Evaluation:**

1. **Participation** (10%). Attendance and active involvement in discussion is critical to progress in this course. Preparation for class each week entails thorough Havruta study in of a section in *Bereshit* in the original Hebrew (up to 20 verses), plus a *daf mekorot* (source sheet with guideline questions for the Beit Midrash), and at least one secondary source, introducing a critical article/reading pertinent to the passage at hand.

2. **Bi-weekly Reflection Papers** (50%). These five written assignments entail bi-weekly reflections on the primary readings, class discussions, and/or articles read over the course of the semester. They may serve as the basis for future *Divrei Torah* that you will present orally to the class and/or to your future congregations. The work (2-3 pages double-spaced, up to 500 words) will be sent to me (by Schoology), and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student).

3. Every week, from Friday, Oct. 2nd (third week of classes), one student will present a *Devar Torah*. (10%), with direct feedback from peers and professor.

4. **Research Paper** (30%). Each student will submit one critical essay of 10 - 12 pages (double-spaced, 12 point, 1” margins), including footnotes and bibliography. Possible topics are listed below; alternative topics must be approved by instructor. The paper should be submitted in two stages:
a) By Fri. Nov. 13th, you are to submit a detailed (1 page) outline of your paper, with a clear research question, title, and bibliography (5 secondary sources, use “Chicago Manual of Style” – Bibliography & Notes). Your bibliography must include at least 5 items (in addition to the Bible) – books or Journal articles all relevant to the topic at hand.

b) Since I am restricting the length to 10-12 pages, I expect the quality of argumentation to be high. Be concise and focus your topic. It is worth 30% of your final grade and is due on the date specified below. The paper will be evaluated on the basis of: content, structure and organization, evidence of independent thought, use of primary sources, use of secondary sources, and style/grammar/spelling. The final paper is due during the last week of classes at 9 a.m. **Tuesday, Dec. 22nd.**

1. **First Week** (Classes 1 & 2) *Berì’at ha-’Adam (Creation of the Human).*

**Wed. Sept. 9th** Introduction; Reading Genesis in its Ancient Mesopotamian Context.

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 1:24-31 Genesis 2:4b-25.
**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 2—36.

**Fri. Sept. 11th** Introducing Rashi and his midrashic sources.

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 1:24-31; “Let us make ‘man’?”
**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 2—36; Optional: Harold Bloom *The Book of J*, pp. 60-62 and 175-187; Robert Alter *Genesis*, pp. 4-10 (on hold in the library).

No classes from Mon. Sept. 14th through Sept. 23rd **HIGH HOLIDAYS**

2. **Second Week** (Classes 3) *The Garden of Eden*

**Fri. Sept. 25th** (after Yom Kippur):  Two Versions of the Creation of Woman;

**Primary Reading:** The Two Creations of Eve; Gen. 1:24-31 & Genesis 2:4b-25, plus daf mekorot and guideline questions.

3. **Third Week of Classes** (Class 4) *The Sin in the Garden*

**Fri. Oct. 2nd** (during Sukkot): **FIRST Devar Torah**

**Primary Reading:** Genesis ch. 3, plus daf mekorot and guideline questions.

#1 –First Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Oct. 7th!
4. Fourth Week (Class 5 & 6): Primordial History

Wed. Oct. 7th *Bnei Elohim* and *Benot Adam*

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 6:1-4 “The sons of God (or divine beings, *bnei elohim*) and the daughters of man (*benot adam*)”; selections from the Book of Watchers (*I Enoch* 1-36); *Jubilees; Genesis Rabbah* and *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

**Secondary Reading:** U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1961), 290-300 (posted to Schoology; also on reserve in the library/Beit Midrash).

Fri. Oct. 9th *Migdal Bavel;*

**Second Devar Torah:**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 11:1-9 “The Tower of Babel” & *dor ha-plagah*; selections from the *Pseudepigrapha; Genesis Rabbah* and *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 67-80; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part II* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1961), 238-249 (posted to Schoology; also on reserve in the library/Beit Midrash).

5. Fifth Week (Class 7 & 8) The Selection of Abraham

Wed. Oct. 14th (Class 7) Selection of Abraham Part I; Abraham of Ur in the Ancient Near Eastern Context; *toledot* and the Table of Nations;

**Primary Reading:** Gen. ch. 11-12.

**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 81-119.

Fri. Oct. 16th (Class 8) The Selection of Abraham Part II: Rashi and his Midrashic;

**Third Devar Torah:**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 11:26-32; *daf mekorot* on “Abraham and the Fiery Furnace”, with guideline questions.

**Secondary Reading** (opt.): Simi Peters, *Learning to Read Midrash*, pp. 112-124 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library)

#2 –Second Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Mon. Oct. 19th!

6. Sixth Week (Classes 9 & 10) The Wanderings of Abraham


**Primary Reading:** Gen. 12:1-9; *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.


Fri. Oct. 23rd The Wife-Sister Motif;

**Fourth Devar Torah:**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. chs. 12:10-20; Gen. 20:1-18; Gen. 26:6-11.

7. **Seventh Week (Classes 11 & 12) Brit bein Ha-betarim** (The Covenant between the Pieces)

**Wed. Oct. 28th**  God’s Covenant with the Patriarchs

*Primary Reading:* Genesis ch. 15; Jer. 34 – covenant in the Ancient Near Eastern Context.

*Secondary Reading:* Sarna, pp. 120-136.

**Fri. Oct. 30th**  Gen. 15, according to the *mefarshim* and Midrash.

**Fifth Devar Torah:**

*Primary Reading:* Gen. ch. 15 & *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.


#3 – Third Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Mon. Nov. 2nd!

8. **Eighth Week** (Classes 13 & 14); Abraham, Sarah and Hagar;

**Wed. Nov. 4th**  The Handmaid’s Tale

*Primary Reading:* Gen. ch. 16 & 21; plus *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.

*Secondary Reading:* Sarna, pp. 154-165; Phyllis Trible, “Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection,” in *Texts of Terror*, pp. 9-35 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library).

**Fri. Nov. 6th** OPEN with sixth *Devar Torah*:

Reading (as above).

General Discussion and Follow-up: How to Read Texts of Terror.

9. **Ninth Week** (Classes 15 & 16): The Covenant of Promise

**Wed. Nov. 11th**  The Covenant of Circumcision;

**Seventh Devar Torah:**

*Primary Reading:* Genesis ch. 17-18:15,


**Fri. Nov. 13th**  The Anunciation Scene;

**Eighth Devar Torah:**

*Primary Reading:* Gen. ch. 18:11-15; “And Sarah laughed…”


**Paper Proposal due Monday Nov. 16th!**

10. **Tenth Week** (Class 17 and 18): Sodom and Gomorrah
Wed. Nov. 18th: Abraham pleads for Sedom;

Ninth Devar Torah:

Primary Reading: Gen. 18:15-33; “daf mekorot with guideline questions.

Fri. Nov. 20th Sin City: Sodom and Gomorrah Part II;

Tenth Devar Torah:

Primary Reading: Gen. 19:1-38; daf mekorot with guideline questions.
Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 157-163; R. Hendel, C. Kronfeld and I. Parades “Gender and Sexuality”, in Reading Genesis: Ten Methods”, pp. 71-91 (posted to Schoology); J. Kugel, “The Proud and the Stingy”, in The Bible as It Was, 187-189 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library).

#4 – Fourth Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Mon. Nov. 23rd!

NO Class Wed. Nov. 25th (Rachel at SBL Conference)
Or Fri. Nov. 27th – Thanksgiving

11. Eleventh Week (Classes 19 & 20) The Binding of Isaac (ha’Aqedah)

Wed. Dec. 2nd The Binding of Isaac (ha’Aqedah) Part I

Primary Reading: Genesis ch. 22; plus Daf Mekorot;
Secondary Reading: Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar,” from Mimesis, 3-23;

Fri. Dec. 4th The Binding of Isaac (ha’Aqedah) Part II;

Eleventh Devar Torah:

Primary Reading: Gen. 23:1-2, plus Daf Mekorot;
Secondary Reading: Phyllis Trible, “The Sacrifice of Sarah”, in Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative, 170-191 (on Schoology);

#5 – Fifth Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Dec. 8th!

12. Eleventh Week (Classes 19 and 20): The Isaac and Jacob Cycle

Wed. Dec. 7th Toledot Yitzhak: Between Abraham and Jacob;

Twelfth Devar Torah:

Primary Reading: Gen. 25:19-34.
Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 181-190; Michael Fishbane, Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts, pp. 40-62 (uploaded to Schoology; on reserve in the library)
Fri. Dec. 9th  The Stolen Blessing;

Thirteenth (?) Devar Torah:

Primary Reading: Gen. 27:1-28:10, plus daf mekorot with guideline questions.

13. Last Week  NO CLASSES (Exam Week); Dec. 14th – 16th

Final Research Paper due Tues. Dec. 22nd at 9 a.m.

Suggest Topics for Research Papers

Genesis in art or literature (as in The Creation of Man/Woman, the Flood)
The concept of sin the Garden of Eden
Cain and Abel: classic midrash and/or modern interpretations in poetry/art
Feminist interpretation of Genesis: Adam and Eve
Humans and the environment in Genesis
The Tower of Babel in the Ancient Mesopotamian Context
Enoch
Melchizedek
Jacob as Angel Wrestler
Sister-Wife Motif
Aqedah: the Binding of Isaac narrative in art/poetry/fiction
The Covenant(s)
The motif of land
The barren wife motif
Overturn of Primogeniture

Bibliography


**Useful URLs**

1) **JPS: Tanach** - Hebrew and English
   http://www.breslov.com/bible/

2) Comparing translations. You may access the NRSV on line at: http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm. To compare translations see: http://www.blueletterbible.org. See also “The Unbound Bible”, which has an effective search engine and allows you to compare versions: http://unbound.biola.edu/

   See also Bible Gateway with online search engine, http://www.biblegateway.com/

3) http://earlyjewishwritings.com/
   -Includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and Philo

4) Machon Mamre, Tanach in Hebrew (including one with cantillation marks), English (JPS 1917), and parallel Hebrew and English, plus Targum Onqelos
   http://www.mechon-mamre.org/

5) Glossary of Basic Terms in Judaism http://www.jewfaq.org/glossary.htm

   This website contains the complete contents of the 12-volume Jewish Encyclopedia, which was originally published between 1901-1906.

7) **Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)**-- historical overview (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and so forth), as well as ANET (Enuma Elish, Epic of Gilgamesh, Code of Hammurabi, Atrahasis etc…).
   http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook1.asp
   http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.asp
8) **Sacred Texts**, includes ANET, as well as sources for comparative study -- books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric online.  
http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm

9) **Orion Center For The Study Of The Dead Sea Scrolls** - An invaluable site, which includes a Qumran cave tour, Orion Center DSS Bibliography, and online index of DJD volumes.  
http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/index.html

10) The Dead Sea Scrolls Project (DSS) and Other Hebrew Manuscripts  
http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/scr/

11) **Septuagint Studies** (LXX) – new English translation, includes also online resources for the study of the Septuagint:  
http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/#res

12) **Resources for the Study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha**: Online Critical Pseudepigrapha  
http://ocp.tyndale.ca/ (original language of extant texts); for English translations see:  
http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha  
Or **http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/** (includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (also called Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Philo and Josephus)

13) Sefaria for preparing source sheets (a “Living Library of Jewish Texts”)  
http://www.sefaria.org/

**Resources for Divrei Torah or Papers:**

1) The Virtual Beit Midrash (VBM, assoc. with Yeshivat Har Etzion):  
http://etzion.org.il/en

2) The A Historical and Contextual Approach to Torah (TABS):  
http://thetorah.com/

3) What’s P’shat? Blog by Alex Maged  
http://whatspshat.org/tag/whats-pshat/

ADD YOUR OWN…..

**CDs available:**

1) Bible Works – excellent collection of resources (comparative translations, searchable, grammars, lexicons) http://www.bibleworks.com/

2) The Bar Ilan Project – Judaica Responsa (Bible & Rabbinics)  