

The Book of Genesis: Literature, Ethics, Theology

Liberal Studies

Spring 2017

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Course Description

To quote the flyleaf from Robert Alter's translation of Genesis, which we will use in class: "Genesis begins with the making of heaven and earth and all life, and ends with the image of a mummy – Joseph's – in a coffin. In between come many of the primal stories in Western culture: Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Cain's murder of Abel, Noah and the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's binding of Isaac, the covenant of God and Abraham, the saga of Joseph and his brothers. These are stories we attend to throughout our lives, for their beauty, their emotional resonance, their philosophical weight, and their sacredness. They connect us with one another and with generations to come." In this course we will explore together the stories from the book of Genesis, with special attention to their literary quality, their ethical content, and their theological implications.

Required Texts

Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, Harper One, paperback.
ISBN: 006073065X.

Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation with Commentary*, WW Norton, paperback.
ISBN: 039331670X.

David Ferry, *Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse*, FSG, paperback.
ISBN: 0374523835.

Course Requirements

(1) Attendance and participation: Come to class regularly and be prepared to discuss the readings for the week. As part of your preparation for each class, you are expected to spend about six hours with the readings – underlining, taking notes, pondering larger implications, and completing any written assignments that might be due. As you read and think about the biblical text, keep in mind three basic questions, which I will elaborate on further in class: **(a)** *What* does the text say and *how* does it say it; **(b)** *Why* does it say this and not something else; and **(c)** What are the *ethical* and *theological* implications of the text, in other words what would happen if one took this text seriously as a resource for relating to others and for thinking about God?

(2) Three short papers: Due dates are marked below. About three pages on an assigned question, these papers should present a clear thesis and support it with evidence from the texts under consideration.

(3) One term paper: Due at the end of the term, this paper of approximately ten pages could be either an exegetical study (an interpretation based on close text-work) of a particular passage or it could be a more thematic or topical study (which should nevertheless show a close engagement with the biblical text).

Course Schedule

- Jan 12: Introduction to the Course
- Jan 19: The Nature of Biblical Literature
Alter, "To the Reader," and "About the Commentary."
Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar" (on Blackboard).
***** short paper #1 due *****
- Jan 26: The Oldest Story in the World
Read: The Epic of Gilgamesh
- Feb 2: Genesis 1
Read closely: Gen. 1:1 – 2:4.
Friedman, pp. 1-31.
- Feb 9: Genesis 2-3
Read closely: Gen. 2:5 – 3:24.
Phyllis Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry" (on Blackboard).
- Feb 16: Genesis 4-11
Read closely: Gen. 6:11 – 8:22.
Read: Atrahasis (on Blackboard).
***** short paper #2 due *****
- Feb 23: Genesis 12 – 25:11
Read closely: Gen. 16.
- Mar 2: Genesis 12 – 25:11
Read closely: Gen. 22:1-19.
- Mar 9: No class meeting – Spring Break.
- Mar 16: No class meeting – Society of Biblical Literature meeting.
- Mar 23: Genesis 25:12 – 36
Read closely: Gen. 27.

- Mar 30: Genesis 25:12 – 36
Read closely: Gen. 32:23-33.
- Apr 6: Genesis 37-50
*** short paper #3 due ***
- Apr 13: No class meeting – Easter Break.
- Apr 20: Genesis 37-50
- Apr 27: Looking back and looking forward.
- TBA: **Term Papers Due.**
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Please take note of the following:

Academic Standards: MALS and DLS students are responsible for upholding the Georgetown University Honor System and adhering to the academic standards included in the Honor Code Pledge stated below:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Disability Notice: If you believe you have a disability, you should contact the Academic Resource Center—Suite 335, Leavey Center (arc@georgetown.edu) –for further information. This office is responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.