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# Teaching Judaism

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## Teaching Judaism

### Golden mice and Pharaoh's vice: Monotheism in the Hebrew Bible



## TEACHING JUDAISM

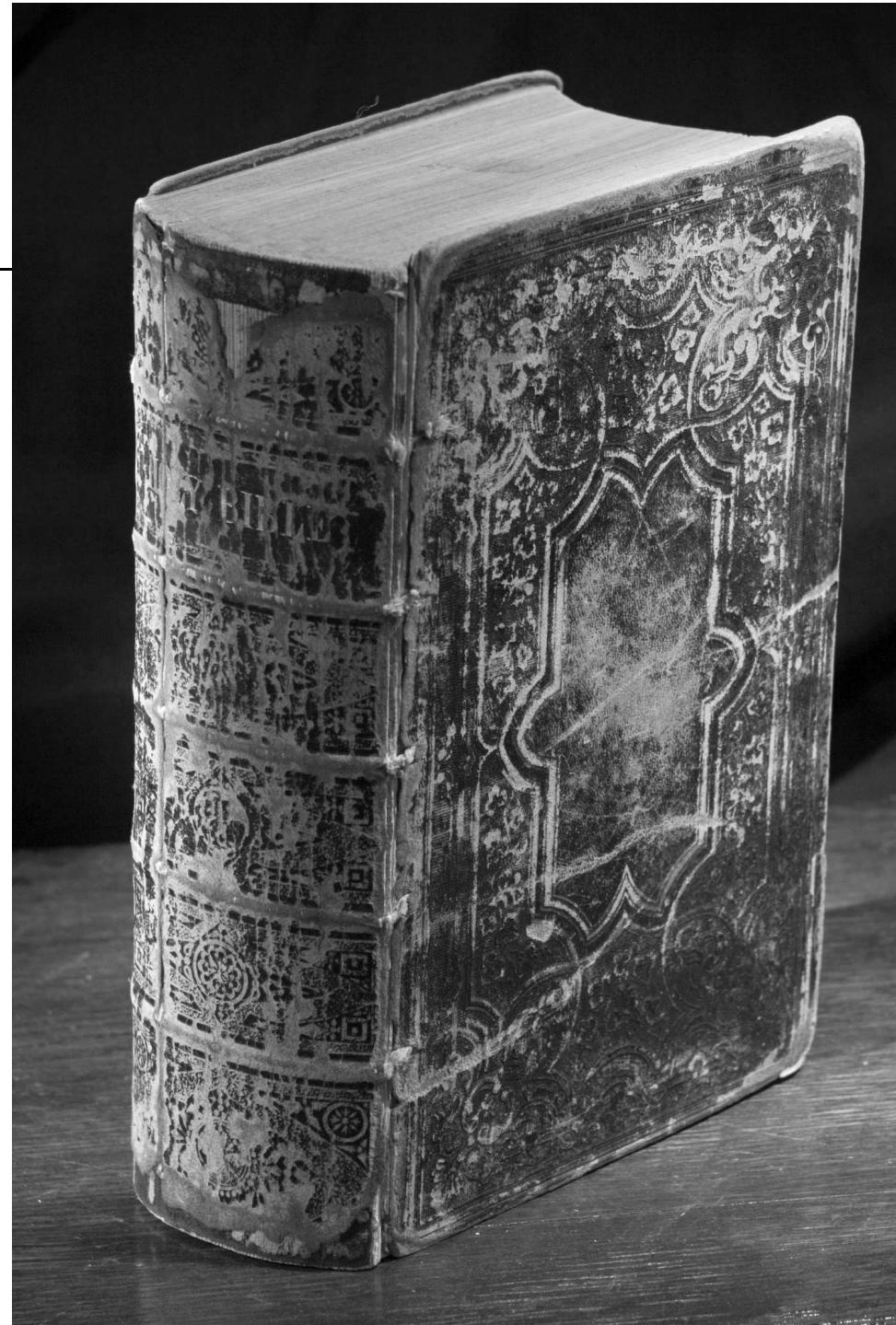
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Judaism is one of the world's most ancient religions, with a history stretching back over 4000 years.

In today's lecture, we'll focus on the Hebrew Bible as a Sacred Text, and how it can be used to teach students about Judaism's Principle Beliefs such as monotheism, the attributes of God, and the idea of covenant.

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The Hebrew Bible:  
A User's Guide

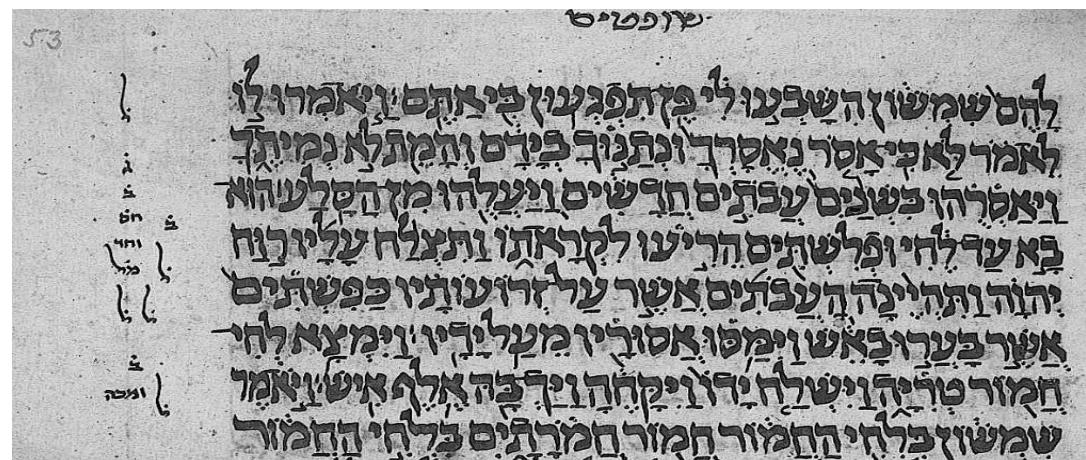




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## The Tanak or Old Testament is often called “The Hebrew Bible”

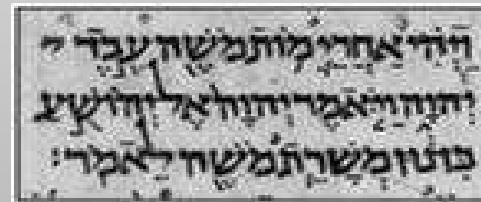
(The Hebrew Bible is in Hebrew ... except for Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11; Dan 2:4b-7:28; and Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 ... in Aramaic)



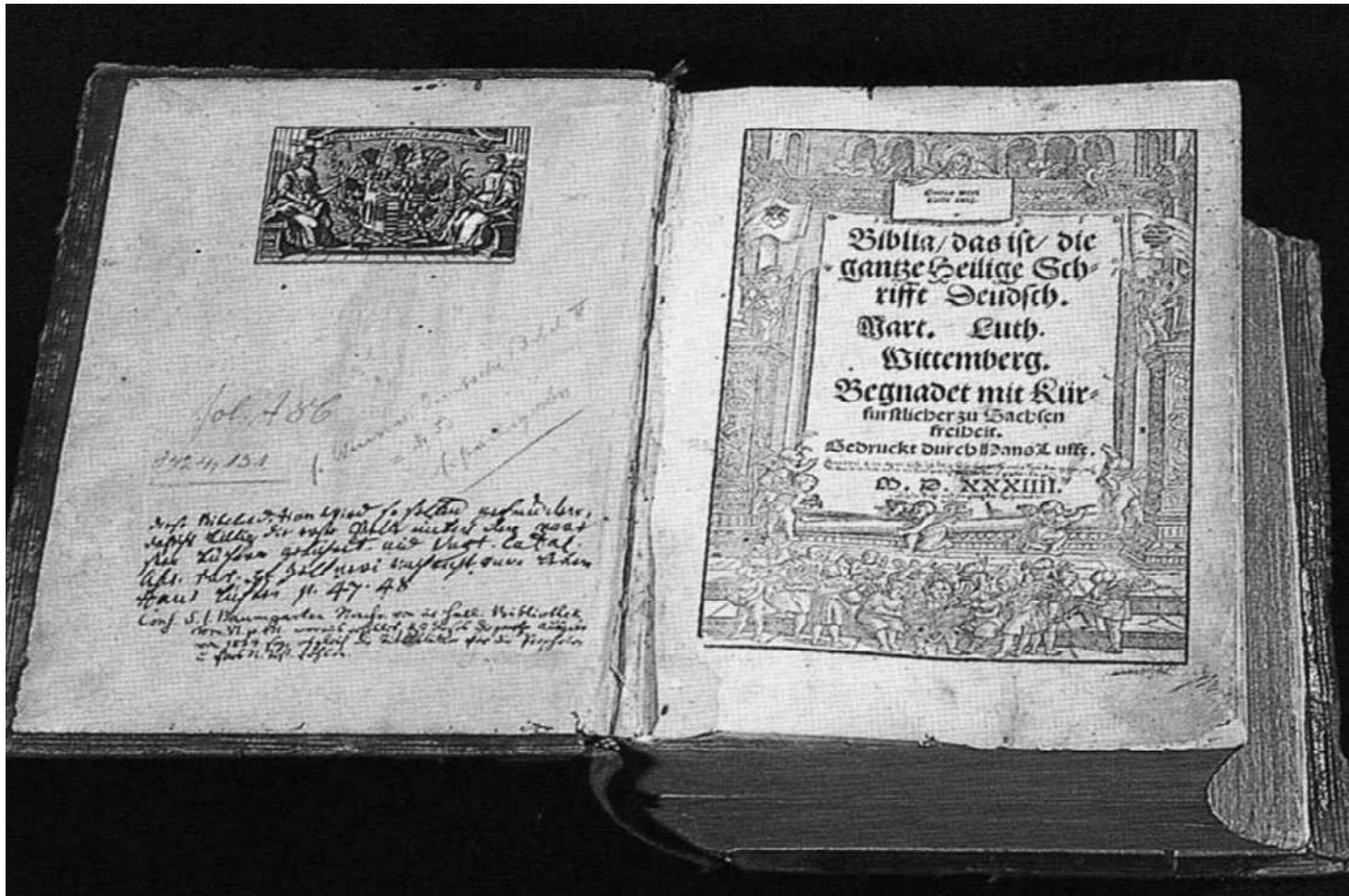
# Traditional Jewish Bible Order: TaNaK



- Torah (“Law”): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Nevi’im (Prophets): (i) Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings  
(ii) Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, XII
- Ketuvim (Writings): Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth,  
Lamentations, Qoheleth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles



# Reading the Hebrew Bible: A Sacred Text



# THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF HEBREW NARRATIVE

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- Biblical literature is both like and unlike other ANE literature.
- Hebrew narratives employ motifs, phrases, patterns, characterisations, plots and literary techniques that can be found in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature
- However, in many ways, Hebrew narrative is distinct. The Hebrew narrative's focus on the changing relationship of a historical nation with a single deity is unique in ANE literature.
- Recent scholarly research suggests that Hebrew narrative presents information in the style that it does to raise questions for its audience to consider, rather than to provide clear answers.

## CREATION AND MONOTHEISM

- **Image:** Akhenaton as a sphinx worshipping the Aton at Amarna. While not directly related, it provides an example of complex monotheism from New Kingdom Egypt.
- And it's just a nice picture.



## MONOTHEISM, POLYTHEISM, AND “FRUITFUL GENERALISATIONS”

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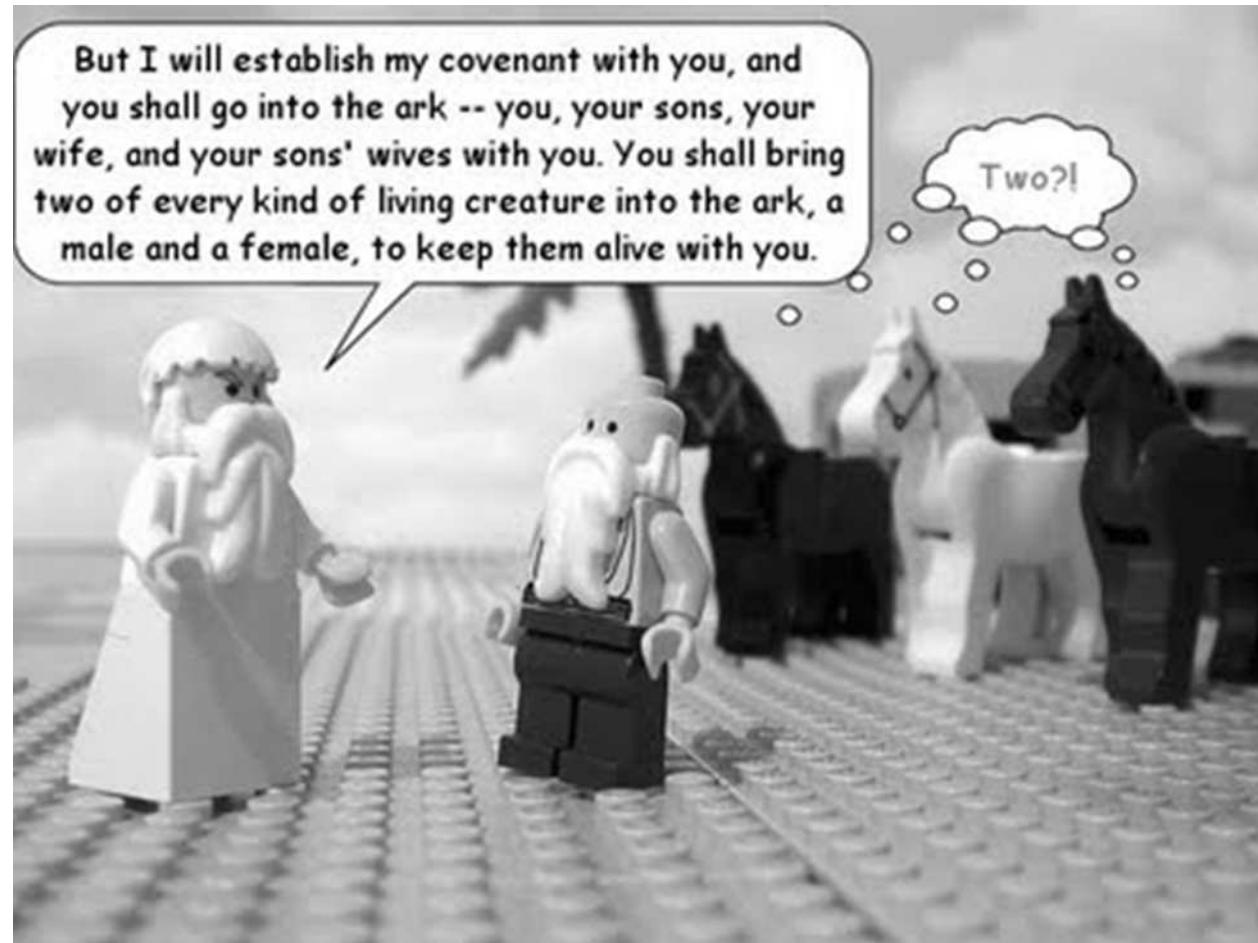


# Universal covenant and the Primeval History

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# Monotheism and the Nature of God

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# The Wizarding Battle of Exodus

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# Anything you can do ...

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Exodus 7: 8-13

8 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 9 “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’” 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. 12 Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron’s staff swallowed up theirs. 13 Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

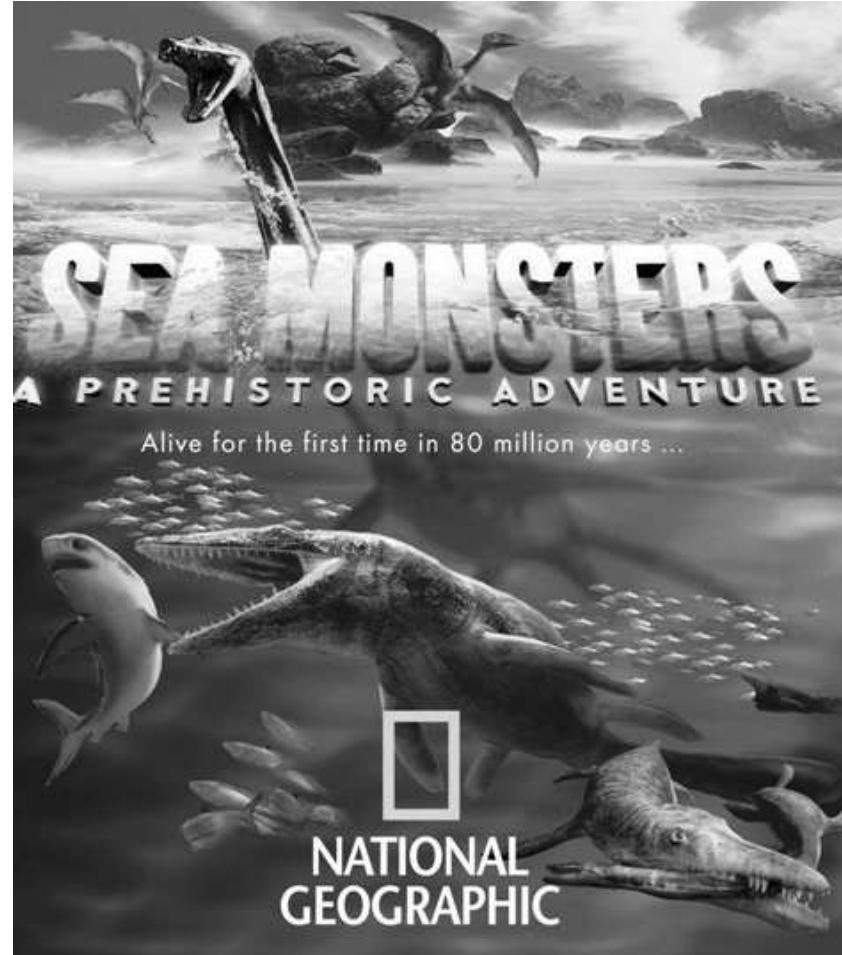


# Snake or Sea Monster?

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Genesis 1: 21

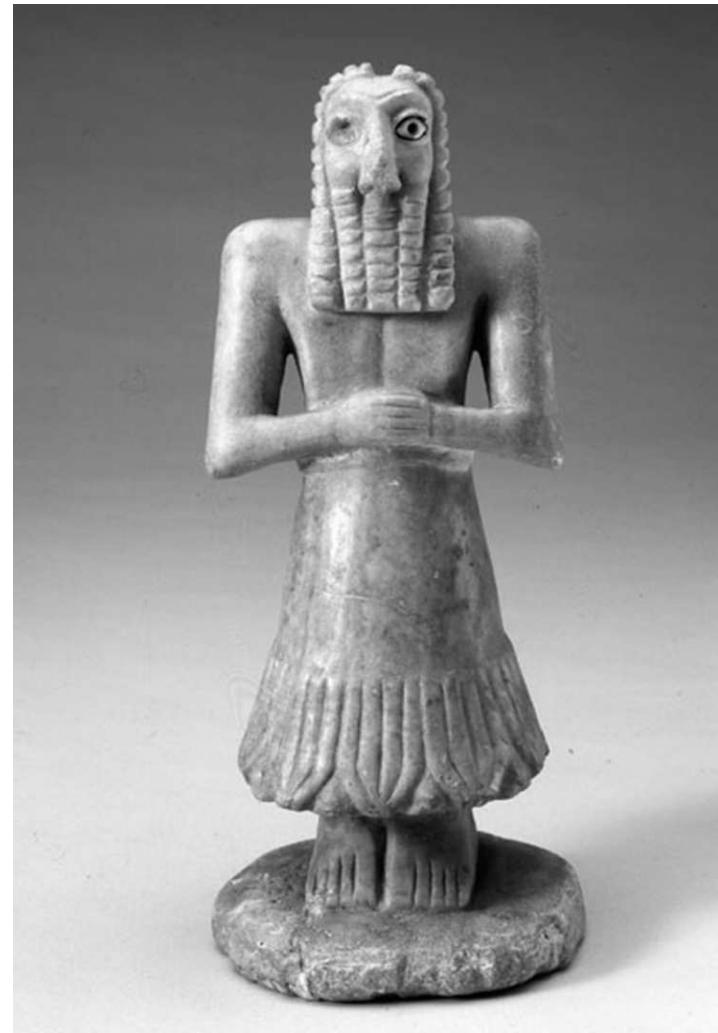
21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.



## The Ark Narrative of Samuel 1



Divine statues in the  
ancient world ... and the  
historical practice of  
'god-napping'

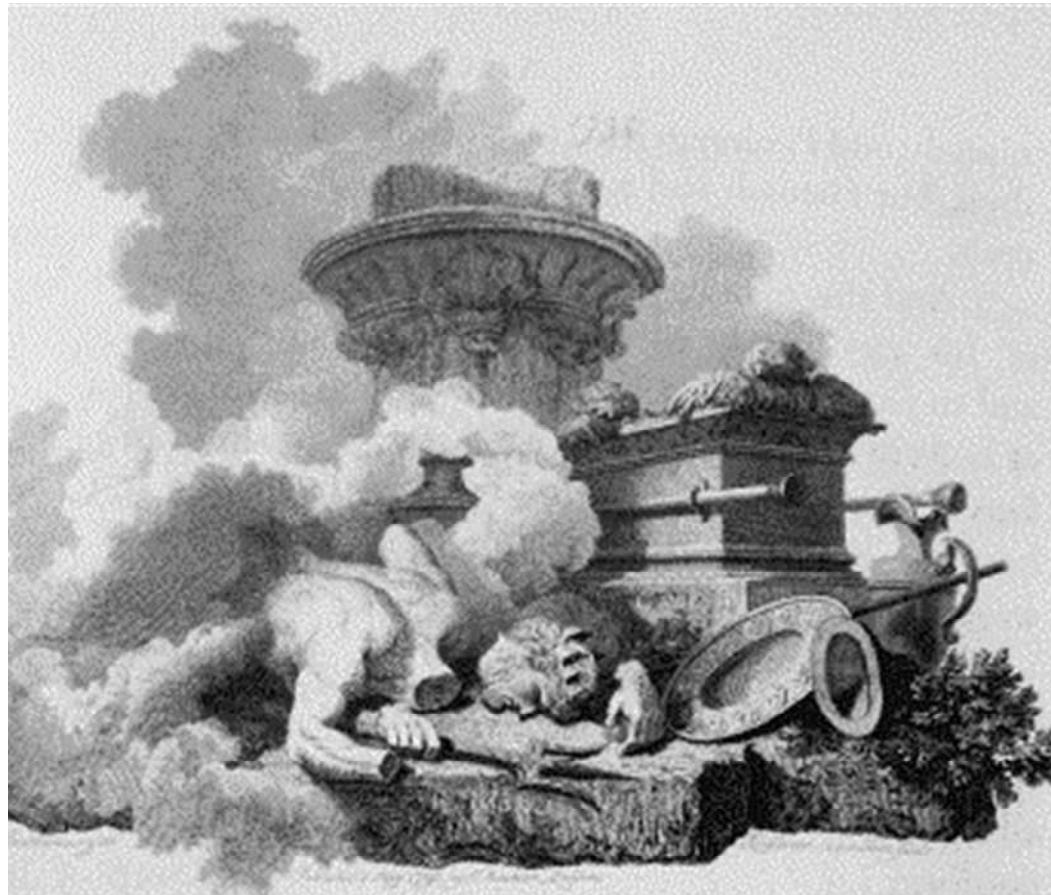


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“When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; 2 then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. 3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

4 But when they rose early on the next morning, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the trunk of[a] Dagon was left to him. 5 This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”

**Image:** Depiction of the destruction of Dagon by Philip James de Loutherbourg, 1793.



## The plague of mice, and the 'ransom' payment





# Monotheism and Covenant

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## Image:

The Vision of the Lord  
Directing Abraham to Count  
the Stars (woodcut by Julius  
Schnorr von Carolsfeld from  
the 1860 Bible in Pictures)



# Abraham: The ‘hinge’ character of Genesis

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Abraham is the progenitor of the Israelite nation, and one of the most important figures of the Pentateuch.

Prior to Abraham, God's dealings with humans are in the primeval history, notably with Adam and Eve, and Noah. The relationship with Abraham evolves from this context in a number of ways:

- Abraham's lineage is traced back from Terah (Abe's father), to Shem, to Noah, and to Adam via Seth, creating a sense of a theological continuum.
- God's promise to Abraham to make him fruitful and numerous (Gen 17:2) is intertextually linked to the divine mandate given to Adam in 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply." Abraham, and later his wife, Sarah, enter into a covenantal relationship with God.

# Covenant

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Q. What is a covenant?

A. “A covenant is a solemn commitment guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both covenanting parties.”  
(Williamson, 2003)

Image: ‘Covenant’ is also the title of the next film in the successful Alien franchise



# The first, universal covenant



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## GENESIS

9: 8 “Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” 17 God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”



Image: Rainbow on Big Island, Hawaii

# More on the Nature of God



Other examples of the nature of God in the Hebrew Bible (among many!):

- In the Covenant Code of Exodus, God reveals that it is his nature to be compassionate.
- The law codes of Exodus and Leviticus reveal a special concern for the poor and vulnerable in society, and for their protection from abuse.
- Biblical laws also reveal a concern for the ethical treatment of animals.
- The Exodus narrative is of great significance in the characterisation of God in the HB: God is often described, or describes himself, as the one who freed his people from slavery in Egypt.
- God is shown to have a personal relationship with humans, and the nation of Israel. Part of this close relationship, related to the subject of monotheism, is God's 'jealous' nature.

# Conclusion

