

Hebrew Bible The Book of Genesis

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 2.2
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1 Course Description

From the creation of the world to the call of Abraham, and from the promise of children to the establishment of the people Israel, the book of Genesis is one of the greatest origin stories ever told. Biblical scholars today write about the “lost world” of Genesis, and so try to account for the genesis of Genesis. There is indeed much to learn about the history behind the Bible’s first book. The book has given rise a major history of its own, too, and this history of interpretation has become an area of interest in recent research. The history of the text includes the question of how Genesis relates to the so-called Abrahamic religions, and so the book also invites ecumenical and interreligious study.

This course will consider multiple approaches to the Book of Genesis. It seeks to integrate what can be known about worlds behind and before the text into a comprehensive theological vision that includes its role as Jewish and Christian scripture, from antiquity down through the present day. Students will have an opportunity to sample ancient and modern interpretations of the book, and to develop their own expositions of it.

Prerequisites: BF 1001; RM 1000 or GTRS 6000.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to: recall and summarize events from the Genesis narratives in detail; characterize literarily the book's main figures; describe major models for the interpretation of Genesis, illustrating their application to particular texts; use and contextualize commentaries on Genesis from a number of different historical eras; reflect on the complex interplay of text, tradition, and interpretation; analyze claims made by different faith communities on the legacy of Abraham; critique specific arguments put forward by scholars about the theological meaning of Genesis; generate questions relevant to the interpretation of short passages from Genesis; construct an original argument in aid of the exposition of short passages from Genesis.

3 Required Texts & Materials

In addition to the Bible in a modern translation such as the NJPS and NRSV, the following text is required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies. The AST Library copy (BS 1235.53 C36 2022) will be placed on a 2-hour reserve.

[CCG] Arnold, Bill T., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Genesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the semester. Excerpts from this literature may either be placed on reserve or made available for download through the course website. Outstanding students will also pursue leads on their own, using library databases and pursuing notes and bibliographies in the required reading.

Major modern commentaries on Genesis include:

M. M. Kalisch (1858)	A. Richardson (1953)	N. Sarna (1989)
J. P. Lange (ET 1868)	A. Clamer (1953)	H. Seebass (1996–99)
F. Delitzsch (⁵ 1899)	U. Cassuto (1961–64)	J. Ebach [37–50, HthKAT] (2007)
A. Dillmann (⁶ 1892)	E. A. Speiser (1964)	B. Arnold (2009)
H. Holzinger (1898)	W. Zimmerli (³ 1967, 1976)	L. Ruppert (1992–2008)
S. R. Driver (1904)	D. Kidner (1967)	S. Brayford [Septuagint] (2009)
J. Skinner (1910, ² 1930)	G. von Rad (ET ² 1972)	J. Blenkinsopp (2011)
H. Gunkel (⁴ 1917)	R. Davidson (1973)	C. Dohmen [1–11] (2017)
O. Procksch (³ 1924)	C. Westermann (1974)	J. Chr. Gertz [1–11] (2018, ² 2021)
B. Jacob (1934)	B. Vawter (1977)	D. Carr [1–11] (2021)

Commentaries on Genesis in the AST Library include:

Targums: BS 709.2 B5 1987 VV. 1A, 1B, 6 (c. 150–?)	Henry, Matthew: BS 490 H4 1961 (d. 1714)
Didymus the Blind: BS 1235 D4913 2016 (d. 398)	Hershon, Paul Isaac: BS 1235 H47 (1883)
Augustine of Hippo: BS 1235 A8413 1991 (d. 430)	Delitzsch, Franz: BS 1235 D4 (1888)
Bede, the Venerable: BS 1235 B43 2008 (d. 735)	Skinner, John: BS 1235 S45 1917, 1963 (1930)
ACCS, Genesis 1–11: BS 1235.3 G46 2001	Richardson, Alan: BS 1235 R66 1959
ACCS, Genesis 12–50: BS 1235.53 G46 2002	Cassuto, Umberto: BS 1235.3 C3 (1961)
RCS, Genesis 1–11: BS 1235.53 G455 2012	Herbert, Arthur: BS 1235.3 H4 (1962)
Luther, Martin: BR 330 E5 1955 VV.1–8 (d. 1546)	Speiser, E. A.: BS 1233 S64 1964
Calvin, John: BS 1235 C293 1948 (d. 1564)	Kidner, Derek: BS 1235.3 K47 (1967)
Patrick, Simon: BS 1235 P36 1695	Rad, Gerhard von: BS 1235.3 R3213 1972

Plaut, Gunther: BS 1225.3 P55 V. 1 (1974)	Hartley, John: BS 1235.3 H37 2000
Vawter, Bruce: BS 1235.3 V38 1977	Towner, Sibley: BS 1235.3 T69 2001
Davidson, Robert: BS 1235.3 D3 1973, 1979	Walton, John: BS 1235.53 W35 2001
Leibowitz, Nehama: BS 1235.3 L413 1981	Cotter, David: BS 1235.52 C68 2003
Wenham, Gordon : BS 491.2 W67 1982	Briscoe, Stuart: BS 1151.2 C66 2004
Brueggemann, Walter: BS 1235.3 B78 (1982)	McKeown, James: BS 1235.53 M35 2008
Maher, Michael: BS 1235.3 M346 1982	Arnold, Bill: BS 1235.53 A76 2009
Westermann, Claus: BS 1235.3 W43213 1986, 1987, 1994	Goldingay, John: BS 1235.53 G65 2010
Sarna, Nahum: BS 1235.3 S325 1989	Reno, Russell: BS 1235.53 R46 2010
Hamilton, Victor: BS 1235.3 H32 1990, 1995	Cook, Joan: BS 1235.53 C66 2011
Scullion, John: BS 1235.3 S37 1992	De La Torre, Miguel: BS 1235.53 D4 2011
Fox, Everett: BS 1223 A3 F68 1995	Coleson, Joseph: BS 1235.53 C64 2012
Hamilton, Victor: BS 1235.3 H323 1995	Longman, Tremper: BS 1235.53 L66 2016

Also, the following basic works are also worth consulting and even owning. [Making] in particular contains sound advice on core skills like reading religious texts, writing essays and reviews, revising essays, making oral presentations, and learning languages.

[Making] Northey, Margot, Bradford A. Anderson, and Joel N. Lohr. *Making Sense in Religious Studies: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2019. AST Library: Reference BL 41 N67 2019.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free *Student Supplement for SBL2*. AST Library: Reference PN 147 S26 2014.

5 Course Outline

We will adhere to the schedule in [Table 1](#) as closely as possible, though the professor reserves the right to adjust it to suit the needs of the class.

See the AST website for a list of other [important dates](#).

6 Evaluation and Grade Structure

1. **Notes and quotes** will be solicited from students at the start of each class. These are to be drawn from the primary and secondary readings assigned for each week. What do you note about Genesis on this occasion? What words, phrases, or verses stand out to you from your translation? Why so? Also, what ideas or formulations strike you from the contributors to [CCG]? Are they useful to you as experts and “companions”? How do their discussions seem to help or impede your reading of Genesis?
2. Student input in **seminar discussions** will be evaluated on the basis of two elements.
 - (a) Students will select a commentator or major version for a period of 3–5 weeks, during which time they are responsible to report on it in class and bring its insight to bear on the seminar discussions. Recognizing that everyone will be working with different resources from the exegetical tradition, come prepared each week to be the resident expert on your particular commentary.
 - (b) Twice in the term, students will lead 20-minute seminars on single chapters from the book of Genesis. They should take the lead by briefly outlining the chapter in question, situating it relative to the rest of Genesis, and reporting on their research into part of that chapter. Then, in the balance of the time, they should

§. Primary	Secondary	Date
I. PRIMEVAL HISTORY		
1. Genesis 1	Course syllabus	12 Sep.
2. Genesis 2–3	Arnold, Strawn [CCG, 1, 10]	19 Sep.
3. Genesis 4–9	Ska, Gertz [CCG, 2, 3]	26 Sep.
4. Genesis 10–11	Levin, Bauks [CCG, 4, 5]	3 Oct.
II. ANCESTRAL NARRATIVES		
5. Genesis 12–15	Mandell, Walton [CCG, 6, 7]	10 Oct.
6. Genesis 16–20	van der Meer [CCG, 11]	17 Oct.
~. No Class: Reading Week (Tuesday to Friday)		24–27 Oct.
☞ Review essay is due before the seventh week of class		27 Oct.
7. Genesis 21–25	Gould, Aquino [CCG, 13, 14]	31 Oct.
8. Genesis 26–30	Steinberg [CCG, 8]	7 Nov.
9. Genesis 31–36	Shectman [CCG, 9]	14 Nov.
III. THE JOSEPH STORY		
10. Genesis 37–41	Otto [CCG, 12]	21 Nov.
11. Genesis 42–45	Kaminsky [CCG, 15]	28 Nov.
☞ Exegetical essay is due before the twelfth week of class		1 Dec.
12. Genesis 46–50	Provan [CCG, 16]	5 Dec.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses		14 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

helping the class elaborate, reflect on, test, challenge, or extend a central idea or two. Students are encouraged to align at least one of their seminar texts with their work on their exegetical paper.

3. Two **papers** will facilitate student engagement with the art of biblical interpretation. One is keyed to the critical analysis of a work of post-biblical interpretation, the other to the exposition of a short biblical text.

- (a) A **review essay** invites student reflection on a model work of biblical interpretation. Some pre-approved options are listed as further readings in [section 8](#). Alternatively, you may propose a different title to the professor, subject to approval. The review essay should be **3,000 words** in length.

Note that a review is not the same thing as a report. Devote the first half of the paper to a summary the interpretation or argument under review. Devote the second half of the paper to critical analysis and evaluation of your chosen example. Be fair, but do not fail to take a position. The paper needs to develop a **thesis**. See me and [[Making](#), chs 3, 5–7, 11] for guidance.

- (b) An **exegetical essay** provides an opportunity for direct work with the biblical text. The first task is to identify an appropriate text. Select a suitably short passage from Genesis. Then, conduct an analysis and explication of it. Interact with at least five sources and commentators. Advance a **thesis** that relates to the text itself. The exegetical essay should be **4,000 words** in length. See me and [[Making](#), chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for guidance.

The breakdown for the semester's total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

Notes & Quotes	10%
Seminar Discussions	20%
Review Essay	30%
Exegetical Essay	40%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST's [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks. Note that graduate and undergraduate programs are currently assessed on a different scales at AST (see [Table 3](#)). For graduate students, a grade of C is deemed "Unsatisfactory," whereas for undergraduate (BTh) students, a C is "Satisfactory" and the grade of D is possible for "Marginal" performance.

Graduate Courses			Undergraduate Courses	
A+	94–100	Exceptional	90–100	Excellent
A	87–93	Outstanding	85–89	Excellent
A–	80–86	Excellent	80–84	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good	75–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable	70–74	Good
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable		
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory	60–69	Satisfactory
D			50–59	Marginal
F	0–59	Failure	0–49	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism	0	Failure due to Plagiarism

Table 3: Summary Definitions of Grades at AST

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Students must submit something before the deadline if they wish to receive credit. Unless I state otherwise, assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM (Atlantic) on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten and double-spaced. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [\[SBL2\]](#) in [section 4](#), above). As a reminder, AST upholds an Inclusive Language Policy. Please use gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Our traditions have different norms for speech about God; you are of course free to follow and explore those traditions when referring to God.

Plagiarism is the **failure to attribute** (by means of footnotes when writing or aloud when speaking) any ideas, phrases, sentences, materials, syntheses, et cetera, that another author has composed and that you have borrowed for your own work. Plagiarism is unethical. Academic penalties for plagiarism at AST are serious, and may include failure of the course or even suspension of further studies. Unintentional plagiarism is considered plagiarism. AST's Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.

Students should request permission to record a class or lecture. If permission is granted, or if recordings are provided (as in the case of an online or hybrid course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have needs that require modifications to any aspect of this course, please consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Any documentation regarding disabilities that you

wish to divulge to AST should be provided to the Registrar's Office, where it will be kept in a confidential file.

Finally, I encourage the conscientious use of laptops, tablets, and other technology in my classes. In classroom settings, realize that, as **cognitive psychologists have demonstrated**, "laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers." Do your part to foster an environment for dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online and hybrid settings, consider both the physical environment in which you choose to work and the virtual environment that you help create through your participation in various forums. Let your engagement in this course be marked by rigour and charity alike.

8 Selected Bibliography

Literature on Genesis is vast. The few works listed here have been selected for clarity, insight, and/or theological alertness. They are eligible as selections for review essays.

- [1] Allert, Craig D. *Early Christian Readings of Genesis One: Patristic Exegesis and Literal Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.
- [2] Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- [3] Anderson, Gary A. *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- [4] Davis, Ellen F. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- [5] Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns on Paradise*. Translated by Sebastian Brock. Popular Patristics Series 10. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990.
- [6] Gunkel, Hermann. *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*. Translated by W. H. Carruth. New York: Schocken, 1964.
- [7] Levenson, Jon D. *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- [8] Moberly, R. W. L. *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- [9] Provan, Iain. *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- [10] Schneider, Tammi J. *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- [11] Smith, Mark S. *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.
- [12] Tribble, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

For additional literature, I recommend exploring **Oxford Bibliographies: Biblical Studies (Full Text)**. You can access the database automatically while on campus or remotely with OpenAthens credentials. Numerous articles by subject-area specialists appear under such headings as: Ancient Near East; Bible; Early Christianity; Greco-Roman World; Hebrew Bible; New Testament; Rabbinic Judaism; Second Temple Judaism. For HB 3111, see especially **Victor H. Matthews, "Book of Genesis,"** doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780195393361-0044.