

# Genesis, a history - His 163B

## INSTRUCTOR

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[Site for the course on Genesis](#)

## DESCRIPTION

An introduction to ways of reading Genesis and map its possible history. What historical and literary methods are currently in use for the interpretation of this book? Why was and is this important? Texts, history, and iconography of neighboring traditions (Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, Greek) are also studied when appropriate.

## PREREQUISITES

His-44 (Introductions to the Cultures of the Ancient Near) is good preparation. A course in Biblical narratives and some basis in Hebrew or Greek are also useful. For any question regarding class level, see instructor.

## BOOKS

### 1. Required:

- Robert Alter. *Genesis. Translation and Commentary* 1997. (Available for about 13 dollars on the market).
- Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis : Content, Interpretation, Reception* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016. [Available to UCSC students](#)
- Dever, W. G. *Beyond the texts: an archaeological portrait of ancient Israel and Judah*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017. [Available to UCSC students](#)

### 2. Recommended:

- Coogan (and others). *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.
- S. Harris and R.L. Platzner. *The Old Testament. An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003
- Claus Westermann. *Genesis: an introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

- I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman. *The Bible unearthed: archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts*. Free Press, New York, 2001.
  - H. Gunkel. *The legends of Genesis, the Biblical saga and history*. 1902 (1964).
3. On Reserve at MacHenry Library, UCSC:
- R. Brown et al. eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990 (2 copies).
  - N. Cohn. *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*. 1993 (2 copies).
  - J. Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton, 1969 (2 copies).

## SCHEDULE

1. Week 1: Introduction to historical and exegetical methods. Presentation of the documentary hypothesis, source criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism. When was this text really written, and how would one know it? On-going discussion at every stage of the course of the history of Israel-Judah in the 8th-5th c. BC, as likely background for the writing of Genesis.  
Creation of the world, Gen 1.1-2.3; Mesopotamian Epic of Creation.  
Creation of man and woman, Gen 2.4-3.24. Parallels in other myths.
2. Week 2: Cain and Abel, Gen 4.1-16; interpretations by Philo and early Church exegetes.  
The invention of culture and pre-flood generations (4.17-6.8): birth of evil in myth.  
The flood, 6.9-9.29. Noah in subsequent literature. Comparison to Enoch and Jubilees.
3. Week 3: The Tower of Babel, 10.1 to 11.26. Historicity of flood stories? Interpretation by Philo and allegorization.  
Abraham cycle (11.27 to 25.18): The call to Abraham and Abraham-Sarah in Egypt, 12.1-13.1. Meaning of biblical geography in the historical context of late, 7th c. BC Judah.  
Abraham and Lot, the four kings, the covenant: 13.2 to 15.21.
4. Week 4: Hagar and Ishmael, 16.1-16.  
Covenant with Abraham, 17.1-27.  
The guests of Abraham and Lot, 18.1-33: hospitality of Abraham in other texts and iconography.
5. Week 5: The destruction of Sodom and the story of Lot, 19.1 to 19.38.  
Abraham and Abimelech; Birth of Isaac and expulsion (sacrifice) of Hagar and Ishmael, 20.1 to 21.21.  
The 'aqedah or binding of Isaac, 22.1-19.

6. Week 6: Death of Sarah and Abraham buys a burial site for her, 23.1-20.  
The story of Rebekah, 24.1-67 (developed type-scene at a well).  
The birth of Esau and Jacob, 25.19-34;
7. Week 7: The blessing of Jacob, 25.19-34;  
Jacob's fleeing, and vision at Bethel, 27.46 to 28.22.  
His marriages and children, 29.1 to 30.24.
8. Week 8: Jacob the trickster and Laban, 30.25-43, and his flight again, 31.1-54.  
Jacob prepares to meet Esau, and the struggle with the angel, 32.1-33.  
The rape of Dinah and relationship with Canaanites, 34.1-21. References to other violent scenes in the Bible. Read Tribble and others.
9. Week 9: The story of Joseph (37.1 to 50.26). Short story or didactic tale?  
Joseph sold and taken to Egypt, 37.1-36;  
Judah and Tamar, 38.1-39: holiness and prostitution.
10. Week 10: Joseph and Potiphar's wife, 39.1-23; compare the Egyptian Tale of two brothers.  
Joseph as interpreter of dreams for prisoners and Pharaoh, 40.1 to 41.57.

#### EVALUATION OF STUDENTS

- Weekly discussions (logs) of short passages chosen from among those studied in class (20%), to be brought in class.
- Two shorter, five-page, papers on pre-arranged topics. A longer paper of ten pages on a topic of the student's choice, chosen from a list of topics given by the instructor (20 + 20 + 40% = 80%).