HEBREW 411 : HOW TO READ THE BIBLE
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to acquaint the student with some of the most exciting, captivating chapters and books, chronicles and characters of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). In this course the student will learn how to analyze systematically the Biblical text and appreciate its ramified layers including the aesthetic/artistic texture and the ideological messages molded and conveyed by the artistic/aesthetic texture (such as liturgical, moral, historical, social, political). Throughout the duration of the course the student will learn about some of the most appealing, compelling topics of the Hebrew Bible: love, disdain, compassion, generosity, animosity, envy, rivalry, hope, hatred, cultivated aspirations, frustrated expectations, wisdom, folly, loving-kindness, loyalty, betrayal, calamity, shrewdness, innocence, benevolence, elevated moral values, lofty liturgical proclivities, lofty dedication to God, breaching God's commands, national inclinations, prophetic visions, unbridled ambition, humility, untamed haughtiness, unrestrained greed, cunning manipulations, military victories, military defeats, philosophical considerations, fear, stupendous desires, conspiracy, submission, cruelty, mercy, ambition, and many more.

The student will learn how to read the Bible critically, prudently, and in the most insightful depth. When it comes to the aesthetic/artistic layers of the Biblical text the student will learn to discern and probe literary devices, patterns, structures,
mechanisms and the various, effective, "dexterous", sophisticated ways in which they serve, convey and enhance their intriguing, engaging messages (see list of topics above). This way, the student will learn how to read the Bible creatively, while unearthing and identifying the Bible's worthy, challenging literary intricacies and elevated ideological qualities. In this respect, the course will guide the student to act in the capacity of a discriminating, enlightened "Biblical/literary archaeologist" who unveils the Bible's most latent structures and unearths the Bible's most powerful, effectual, complex meanings.

A CASE STUDY

The following case study may operate in the capacity of a "test tube", one that displays plausibly the aesthetic intricacy of the Hebrew Bible and the way it dexterously serves, enhances a delivers the ideological message (in this case both liturgical and moral) inlaid in the Biblical text in focus.

When Moses (Moshe, in Hebrew) is descending the Mount Sinai, the Mountain of God, he introduces to the Israelies the two tablets with the ten commandments engraved on them (see the book of Deuteronomy). The Israelites respond with no hesitation whatsoever while articulating two words only: "na'aseh ve-nishma". "Na'aseh" means 'we shall do', 'we shall act/perform', but in this context it means 'we shall obey', 'we shall follow'. "Ve-nishma" means 'we shall hear'.

The discriminating, prudent, well trained reader, may trace in that exceedingly short reply an intricate aesthetic pattern that consists of two Hebrew words only; and that aesthetic pattern serves efficiently, impressively, the liturgical/moral message that that tiny Biblical text aims to deliver. That aesthetic pattern is constructed on
various layers which are causally connected: they lead from one to the next one, they derive from the previous one.

The first layer of that aesthetic pattern is thematic, since it consists of two themes:

(1) to follow/to obey and (2) to hear. The next aesthetic device/layer (which is part of the comprehensive aesthetic pattern) is structural/organizational: the sequential structure in which the two themes are inlaid in the probed text, the sequential order of presentation in which the two themes (to follow/obey and to hear) are delivered to the reader.

However, that organizational/structural device is blatantly questionable: how can a person promise to obey, to follow a command, before he/she heard that command? Is it logical that a person will commit himself/herself to follow/obey a command before he/she had the chance to hear that command? That natural, genuine-even elementary-wonder (on the part of the reader) is indeed the third aesthetic device that is rooted in the comprehensive aesthetic pattern in focus. Hence, that illogical, structural/organizational device, that enigmatic sequential order of organization/presentation, yield a surprise. And a surprise is a rhetorical device that determines how the reader should "digest", comprehend the conveyed text.

Rhetoric is indeed one of the ways in which the text goads and encourages the reader to understand the text in a very specific fashion. That rhetorical device urges the reader to unearth the latent ideological (liturgical, moral) message which is rooted "cryptically" in the aesthetic pattern in focus. That message is the following:

The Israelites cogently display their most admirable, unconditional faith in God, their most praiseworthy, laudable religious piousness, to the point that they commit themselves to follow and obey God's command even prior to hearing it.

Hence, that minute aesthetic pattern, that tiny example, is like a drop of water that reflects the nature of the entire ocean. That minute
The aesthetic pattern exhibits persuasively the aesthetic intricacy of the Biblical text: three aesthetic devices (thematic, structural/organizational, rhetorical) are causally clustered, in a way that one leads to the next one while deriving from the previous one, in order to convey an ideological message (liturgical, moral) that is conveyed by the complex, harmonious operation of that aesthetic pattern while performing outstanding "textual dexterity".

The class' discussions will acquaint the student with numerous more Biblical literary devices/patterns/mechanisms that exhibit a remarkable, praiseworthy "aesthetic dexterity". Naturally, the first class' discussions will be conducted on a level that meets the beginner's capacity to cope with Bible's aesthetic intricacy and complexity. Later class' discussions will address more complicated and challenging aesthetic intricacies and the complex ways they serve, convey and hence ideological (liturgical, historical, moral, social, political) proclivities.

**BIBLICAL TOPICS, CHAPTERS AND BOOKS TO BE ADDRESSED AND PROBED THROUGH THE DURATION OF THE SEMESTER**

**Week 1**

(1) Two contradictory creation stories (of vegetation, animals and human beings)  
(Genesis 1, 2).

(2) The questionable way in which God is looking for Man's spouse; and for what "enigmatic" purpose Man names the animals; the "shrewd" way in which Man turns into a "verbal creator" (Genesis 2).
( 3 ) The first iniquity and the eviction of Man ( Adam ) and Woman ( Eve ) from the Garden of Eden: the first human transgression, the loss of innocence, the loss of immortality; and how the woman is punished due to her admirable desire to acquire knowledge and satisfy her intellectual curiosity ( Genesis 3 ).

**Week 2**

( 4 ) The brutal wickedness of human beings ( that led to the destructive flood ) and the questionable, dubious righteousness of Noah ( Genesis 6 ).

( 5 ) The tower of Babel, the unforgivable haughtiness, arrogance executed by human beings, and the merciless destruction of the city named Babel and the tower of Babel; the meaningful etymology of the Hebrew word "Babel"/"Bavel"; what is the point of naming a city after it was totally demolished ( Genesis 11 ).

( 6 ) Terah, Abram, Sarai and Lot voyage from their stupendous place of birth, the immense, colossal city of Ur, heading to Haran, a place that was totally unknown to them. Who told Terah about the land of Canaan ( the ultimate destination of his/their voyage? And how that knowledge reached him? )

Again: why did they launch such a voyage? Who urged them to do that? What did force them to uproot themselves from the flourishing, laudably cultural city of Ur and wander to an extremely distant foreign land that was for them "Tabula Rasa" ( Latin: unmarked/unwritten board )? ( Genesis 11 ).

( 7 ) God's appearance to Abram for the first time; God's celestial promise to
Abram; Again: enigmatic, seemingly illogical aspects associated with Terah's voyage from prosperous Ur in order to reach "Terra Incognito" (Latin: unknown land) Haran (while having in mind to reach the Land of Canaan about which he knew nothing); God's bewildering seemingly lack of historical knowledge; God's enigmatic way in which He addresses Abram as if God is a realtor.

And why does Abram refrain from asking God about the purpose for uprooting himself from his abundant homeland and traveling to that distant, totally unknown country? Is there a liturgical/ideological reason for Abram's "muteness"?
(Genesis Genesis 12).

(8) Abram builds two different altars to God. Why two? What is the significant difference between the two altars, one that forces Abram to erect both altars
(Genesis 12).

Week 3

(9) God's more celestial promises to Abraham; the covenant of circumcision;
The future, wondrous birth of Isaac; how the name Isaac" (in Hebrew"Yitzchak")
is associated with sexuality that leads to fertility that leads to life?
discussion of meanings of Hebrew names (since ALL Hebrew names carry meanings that can be easily traced and comprehended by the discriminating Hebrew reader).
(Genesis 17).

(10) The three heavenly harbingers pay a visit to Abraham and Sarah; Does Abraham know that their are celestial harbingers?
(Genesis 18).
Week 4

( 11 ) Abraham argues with God ( indeed, practically scolding God ) about the unfair destruction of righteous people due to the abhorrent evil committed by the people of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ( Genesis 18 ).

( 12 ) The two celestial harbingers visit Lot in the abominable, hideous city of Sodom ( Genesis 19 ).

( 13 ) Lot escapes the destruction of the sinful city of Sodom; Lot's wife disobeys God's command and turns into a pillar of salt ( see the case of woman/Eve, in the Garden of Eden, who was punished severely for disobeying God's command ); Lot fails to lament and mourn the death of his beloved wife; Intoxicated Lot sleeps with his two daughters; the forthcoming birth of the nations of Amon and Moab. Lot as a "round" character in which both appealing and undesirable characteristics are simultaneously, reciprocally amalgamated. ( Genesis 19 ).

Week 5

( 14 ) Abraham, Sarah and the Philistine king Abimelech in the city of Gerar
Did God approve "selling" Sarah, Abraham's wife, as a "sexual merchandise"?
An enlightening aperture to customs of ancient days in the Middle East.
(15) The birth of Isaac and the eviction of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21).

(16) Abram and Sarai descend to Egypt where Sarai becomes Pharaoh's wife and is robed of her own identity; Again, Abram "sells" his beloved wife as a "sexual merchandise"; The two aesthetic sophisticated devices that display and scold Abram's greed; The indifferent way in which Abram treats his wife Sarai; Does Pharaoh deserve God's piercing plagues? What is the "latent" meaning behind the very long, detailed list of gifts that Abram gets from Pharaoh? (Genesis 12).

**Week 6**

(17) Abraham's excruciatingly challenging test: The (almost) sacrifice of Isaac;
   The conflict between "two Abraham" in that horrendous story: Abraham the loving father versus Abraham the pious believer (Genesis 22).

(18) Jacob's and Esau's birth and how they surprisingly exchange roles;
   How does physically mighty, courageous Esau fear death due to a relative petty, minute reason (hunger) and how does mellow, gentles Jacob act as a cunning, shrewd merchant upon robbing Esau of his justified birthright;
   Do both brothers deserve their names? (Genesis 26).

(19) Isaac, Rebekah and the Philistine king in Gerar; How does this story echo the story of Abraham and Sarah and the Philistine king in Gerar; as well as the story of Abram, Sarai and Pharaoh in Egypt? Why do the Biblical stories "clone" themselves? Is it associated with
the different sources (J; E) that yield those "cloned" "reciprocally echoed" three stories? The J; E; D; P sources will be explained in detail to the students (Genesis 26).

**Week 7**

(20) Sinful King David, Bathsheba and the murder of innocent Uriah; What does King David do in the royal city of Jerusalem while his entire army is fighting bravely, devotedly in the battlefield? The story of crime and punishment; the etymological meaning of the name "Jerusalem"; Does David "deserve" that etymological meaning? (2 Samuel 11 -12).

**Week 8**

(21) The brutal rape of Dinah the daughter of Leah and Jacob; The surprising "muteness" of passive Jacob upon hearing that his young, innocent, blameless daughter was beastly raped, tormented and defiled; The murderous revenge committed by Jacob's sons, Simon and Levi; How does the Biblical narrator subtly rebuke that hideous revenge? How does the Biblical narrator elusively scold the unworthy fatherhood exhibited by Jacob? (Genesis 34).

**Weeks 9 - 10**

(22) Joseph and his sinful brothers in Egypt; Joseph is sold as a slave in Egypt; Joseph is wronged by his Egyptian master's wife who lies by arguing that Joseph tried to take advantage of her; Joseph is put in dungeon
but also there he exhibits exceptional wisdom and enlightened discrimination; Joseph is rescued from dungeon; he deciphers deftly, cleverly the two enigmatic dreams of Pharaoh and reaches formidable greatness in Egypt; Joseph redeems Egypt from oppressive, ravaging famine; Joseph forgives his sinful brothers; Joseph, his brothers and their father Jacob reunite in the land of Egypt (Genesis 37-45).

**Week 11**

(23) The chronicles of young David; David is anointed by the prophet Samuel as the future king of Israel; Young David defeats the giant Philistine Goliath; King Saul who is haunted and tormented by the evil spirit of God turns into David's most vicious foe; David and Jonathan (King Saul's son) who loves David dearly; Michal, (King Saul's daughter) who loves David dearly and marries him; David as a "round" character in which laudable and shameless characteristics are reciprocally amalgamated; Is David a military hero? Is David shrewd and greedy? Is David narcissist who loves himself only (as symbolically/etymologically reflected by his name)? Is David humble or haughty? Apparently, all the above are meaningfully, simultaneously clustered in his complex personality. (1 Samuel 16-18).

(24) The city of Jericho, the Canaanite, kind generous harlot and the two Israelite spies who had never spied (Joshua 2).

**Week 12**

(25) The Israelite slaves in Egypt; The bitingly bitter lives of the Israelites/Hebrews in Egypt; The birth and rescue of Moses; Moses is instructed by God to lead the Israelite slaves from oppressive bondage
to rewarding freedom; Moses performs wonders to convince the Israelite elders that God Himself appeared to him miraculously and ordered him to lead the enslaved Israelites from humiliating, torturing misery to a glorious future of proud freedom; Aaron, Moses' brother joins Moses in order to approach Pharaoh and demand him to free the Israelite slaves (Exodus 1-4).

**Week 13**

(26) Samson, the last Judge: the miraculous rise and the tragic fall of Israel's legendary, stupendously nontraditional judge; Samson, the everlasting stranger, the eternal loner who treads in the twilight zone between his own people and his foes, the Philistines by whom he is greatly enchanted; Samson, the mighty hero is swindled by two women; Unbelievably credulous Samson is trapped in his pathetic naivete, is snared in his piteous childishness; Samson fails to fulfill his mission to redeem the Israelites from the tyrannic yoke of the merciless Philistines; Samson is questionably attracted to the wrong Philistine women (his Philistine wife; the Philistine harlot in Gaza; Philistine Delilah). Two of them betray him. Perhaps also the third one (the Philistine harlot in Gaza; that case is quite opaque).

How Samson's personality and destiny are foreshadowed by his weak father and his clever, active mother? What was the true nature of the encounter between Samson's mother and the celestial "man of God"? How does the Hebrew name of Samson's father (Mano'ach) augur Samson's weakness? (Judges 1-4)

**Week 14**

(27) Satire, farce, humor, comedy, vice, absurd, folly, ridicule in the book of Jonah, the pathetic, childish, egoist prophet who runs away from God right to the arms of God. Jonah as a ridiculous prophet
who puts his idle, narcissist well-being before his demanded dedication to God, before the salvation of the repenting people of the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh; Jonah a grotesque, pitiful prophet whose main goal in life is to serve bountifully Jonah only; Does Jonah learn God's lesson? Can Jonah learn God's lesson? The given name Jonah means in Hebrew "Dove" and his surname, "Ben Amitai" means in Hebrew "The son of truthfulness"; In what way do both Hebrew names reflect ironically Jonah's pitiful, pathetic shortcomings? (Jonah 1-3).

**Week 15**

(28) The book of Esther: from agony to salvation, from despair to redemption; Also: how are the haunted, hunted ones converted into haunting, tormenting hunters; Does the book of Esther convey a moral lesson? The ancient Babylonian mythological "sediments" that can be unearthed and traced in the book of Esther (Jewish Mordekhai = Babylonian god Marduk; Jewish Esther = Babylonian goddess Asherah, the goddess of fertility; Queen Vashti = the Elam goddess Mashti [which means the handsome one is like handsome Esther] and more); In what cryptic, cleverly executed fashion God is mentioned in the scroll of Esther? Does it echo the obscure, indirect reference to God in "Song of Songs"? Tragic and comic layers that can be unveiled in the scroll of Esther (Esther 1-4).

**SCREENED BIBLICAL MOVIES**

Throughout the duration of the course, some Biblical movies will be screened. These movies artistically echo and complement the critical discussions of Biblical themes, plots and characters. The "dialogue" between the Biblical movies and the Biblical topics discussed in the class should enrich the
class considerably. Hence, the Biblical material discussed and analyzed in the class will be illuminated from a new perspective, by another artistic medium. This way, the screened movies should bestow on the discussed and analyzed Biblical material an enriching, appealing, rewarding perspective.

GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE COURSE

(1) The course aims to acquaint the student with some of the most exciting and equally complex Biblical events, chronicles, plots and characters.

(2) The course aims to acquaint the student with some of the most rewarding aesthetic/artistic intricacies of Biblical devices, patterns and mechanisms.

(3) The course aims to acquaint the student with some of the most elevated values, challenging chronicles and lofty moral lessons to be unveiled in the Hebrew Bible.

(4) The course educates the student to become a prudent, sensitive, discriminating reader of the Hebrew Bible; a crafty, enlightened reader who can unearth the latent ramified ways in which the aesthetic/artistic qualities of the Biblical text serve ingeniously their various messages (liturgical, historical, social, moral, ideological and political).

(5) In light of the above, the course coaches the student to become a creative, innovative, discriminating, enlightened Biblical critic (on a level which is in congruence with the level of the course's discussions).
READING LIST

The following chapters:
- The literary character of the Bible
- Biblical Imperatives and the literary play
- Literary criticism and the problem of commentary

( 2 ) Yaira Amit. READING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE: LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE HEBREW BIBLE. Fortress, (no place of publication is mentioned), 2001.
The following chapters:
- The power of stories
- On the role of the reader
- The scenic character
- Characterization

( 3 ) Zvi Adar. THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE. The Jewish Agency of Israel, Jerusalem, 1959.
The following chapters:
- The binding of Isaac
- The tales of Samson
- The stories of Abraham
- Man in Biblical narrative

The following chapters:
- Genesis (by J.P. Fokkelman)
- Exodus (by J.P. Fokkelman)
- Esther (by Jack M Sasson)


The following chapters:
- Gaps, ambiguity and the reading process
- The art of persuasion
- Point of view and its Biblical configuration

BOOKLET

In order to meet the students' convenience, and in order to make sure that all students share the very same English translation of all Biblical texts to be addressed and analyzed in the class, the course's professor compiled a booklet that contains all Biblical texts to be discussed throughout the duration of the entire semester. The booklet includes the course's very detailed and equally comprehensive syllabus.

The booklet can be purchased (about one week prior to the commencement of the semester) at Clark Graphics 2915 North Oakland Avenue; Tel. 414-962-4633.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

- Class' Participation : 10%
- First Paper ( 5 pages ; double spaced ) : 10%
- Midterm Paper ( 7 pages ; double spaced ) : 20%
- Third Paper ( 7 pages ; double spaced ) : 25%
- Fourth/Final Paper / Take Home Exam : ( 10 pages ; double spaced ) : 35%

- Fifth assignment : Throughout the duration of the semester the students will be required to display solid acquaintance with bibliographic materials.
- Sixth assignments : Taking very detailed notes during ALL class' discussions. Those notes will help the student tremendously upon writing the papers. However, the students are strongly encouraged to practice and display in their papers both originality and creativity. Both will be highly valued and will effect the grade of the papers.

7th assignment : The students are expected to read very attentively thr Biblical text to be analyzed in the class while sharing with the class their own original, creative analysis of the Biblical texts to be addressed in the class' sessions.

Topics of papers will be announced through the duration of the semester.
The students will have enough time to compose the papers. The students are strongly encouraged to take detailed notes during the
class' discussions. The professor will be always available for the students and extend help to them in the process of writing their term papers, as well as through the duration of the entire semester. Three weeks before the deadline of handing in the papers, the professor will review in great detail the material to be addressed and analyzed in the papers. The students are strongly encouraged to display and include in their papers their own creative, innovative, original opinions, observations and methods of Biblical exegesis. The professor will answer both patiently and clearly ALL students' questions throughout the entire duration of the semester. Also, the professor will respond very promptly, and in great detail, to all students' e-mailed questions and needs for clarifications.

The students will be requested to read attentively - prior to the class' sessions - the Biblical texts that will be discussed and analyzed in the class. Throughout the duration of the course, while conducting class' discussions, the students will be required to display solid acquaintance with the critical materials included in the bibliographic books' chapters included in the reading list.

**KINDLY NOTE**

Students with disabilities and special needs, as well as soldiers, police officers and fire fighters, will be met by utmost understanding and respect, help and encouragement.