

Syllabus for OLLI course:
The Book of Genesis

First week:

A/ General introduction to the Bible (both Testaments):

Emphasis on the Hebrew Scriptures: languages; writing and writing materials and manuscripts; geography; dates of composition: Documentary Hypothesis and scribal schools as biblical authors: (Yahwist; Elohist; Deuteronomist; Priest); etiologies: (i.e., non-scientific) folk explanations of origins of customs and meaning of personal and place names; (possible screening of video *The Illuminator* on the making of quills, parchment, and illuminated manuscripts)

B/ The First Creation Story of Genesis // Chapter 1:

Priestly author's story of the creation in a series of six days (composed c. 450 B.C.E./B.C.); its emphasis on precise and dedicated observance of the Sabbath in order to assure continuation of creation's existence; the Sabbath as an important basic element of Hebrew identity after centuries of defeat and vassalage to Ancient Near Eastern empires like Assyria and Babylon

Second Week:

A/ The Second Creation Story of Genesis // Chapters 2-3:

The Yahwist's story of Adam and Eve (composed c. 950 B.C.E./B.C.): a myth that explains the origins of death; the story as a warning against Israelite participation in Canaanite fertility rituals; the story as a warning to the king not to overstep his legitimate authority; comparison of this story with episodes in the Gilgamesh Epic; The Atrahasis Epic; The Myth of Adapa

B/ Primeval History Genesis // Chapters 4-11:

Cain and Abel through the Tower of Babel

The Primeval History charts the decline of humanity from the Fall and first fratricide through the story of the Flood and the Tower of Babel; emphasis on the interweaving of the literary sources in the Primeval History; comparisons with episodes of the Gilgamesh Epic

Third Week:

The Patriarch Abraham // Chapters 12-25:

“The Promise” and Covenant with Abraham; the Promise is the literary engine that drives the narrative forward: the Promise theme explained and examined as follows--the Promise is given, threatened, rescued, and renewed; examples in the Abraham Cycle covered; Sodom and Gomorrah; human sacrifice in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible; the Sacrifice of Isaac; conclusion of Abraham Cycle

Fourth Week:

The Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob // Chapters 25:19 – 36:

Jacob and Esau; Jacob’s deception of his father, Isaac, i. e., Jacob as trickster; Jacob, his wives and their twelve sons: the eponymous ancestry of tribal Israel; Laban who tricks Jacob the trickster; Jacob’s reconciliation with his brother, Esau; The Rape of Dinah; analysis of literary sources and principal themes of the narratives: comedy, irony, blessing, and divine protection

Fifth Week:

The Patriarch Joseph // Chapters 37-50:

Joseph and his brothers; Joseph’s dreams; the betrayal of Joseph; Joseph’s further experiences of betrayal and vindication; his brothers’ journeys to Egypt to buy food: the Egyptian famine and its purposes; Joseph as a figure of wisdom and model for the Israelite kings’ courtiers; themes reconciliation and of justice in royal administration; Egyptian wisdom traditions as influence on Joseph narratives; Jacob’s farewell blessing; conclusion of Genesis

Sixth Week:

Genesis in the Bible:

The influence of the Genesis narratives on other literary traditions and compositions in the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures: the Patriarch Joseph in Genesis as a model for Joseph in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative; images and allusions to Genesis’ stories, symbols, and characters in the Psalms (e.g., creation, Sabbath observance); Creation and other Genesis themes in the Wisdom Literature and the Prophets; other references and allusions to Genesis in the Christian Scriptures; continuing influence of Genesis in modern fiction and drama (e.g., *Inherit the Wind*; *A Canticle for Leibowitz*); conclusion of course