Course description:
The Torah or Pentateuch is the foundational text of Judaism and hence of Christianity. Over the centuries, Jews and Christians have debated both among themselves and with each other over the interpretation of every verse—indeed every word and sometimes letter—of the Torah. Yet it continues to intrigue, challenge and sometimes mystify its interpreters. This course is designed to introduce students to the complete text of the Torah in English translation and to some of the strategies of interpretation that scholars, both ancient and modern, have applied to it.

Course objectives:
- Students will learn modern methods of biblical exegesis through an in-depth study of the first five books of the Bible, the Torah.
- Students will gain an understanding of various scholarly approaches to these books and the issues involved in reconstructing the historical background of the texts.
- Discussions will touch upon the different ways that Jews and Christians have historically interpreted the Torah.
- In discussions of the theological issues raised by the texts, students are encouraged to enter into a dialogue with the various theological perspectives that emerge from the texts of the Torah.

Required texts:
3. Supplementary readings on Blackboard [Bb].

Course requirements:
- Careful reading of Bible texts and supplementary readings prior to the class meeting for which they are assigned, and coming to class prepared with questions and comments on the readings. You must bring *The Five Books of Moses* to every class.
- Attendance and participation in class discussions (20% of course grade). Attendance quizzes will be given in the first few minutes of each class, except when they are replaced by a longer quiz. Participation grade will be based on attendance quizzes and oral participation. More than one unexcused absence will negatively affect your grade and more than two may result in a failing grade for participation. A doctor’s note is normally required for an absence to be considered excused. Frequent lateness will also negatively affect your grade.
- Four essays on assigned questions (20%). Essays are to be approximately 3-4 typed double–spaced pages in length, answering the question posed under each day’s readings. You will be assigned to a group to write four essays over the course of the semester. You are expected to back up your arguments with references to the biblical text and to cite all sources (see the attached instructions on the last page for details). Essays are to be handed in at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned and you will be expected to be a discussion leader on the days you hand in essays. Late essays will be docked one increment for each day they are overdue, including the day they are due, if they are turned in after class. (If you turn it in after class, the highest possible grade is A-; the next day, B+, etc.)
- Eight quizzes on the readings (20%). Quizzes will be given in the first 10 minutes of class. Quizzes missed due to an excused absence may be made up at the discretion of the professor; missed quizzes due to
unexcused absence will receive a grade of zero. If you know you must miss class on a quiz day, please contact me before that day to reschedule your quiz.

♦ **A midterm exam (15%).** Must be taken on scheduled day (July 18). Makeup exams will be allowed only in the case of a documented emergency.

♦ **A cumulative final exam (25%).** August 6, regular class time.

**Grading scale:**
The following is the university’s grading scale. Note that the grade for average work is C+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Honors level or superior work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>Excellent work with slight imperfections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Very good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good, solid, above average performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>Still above average, but lacking depth, completeness, or accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Average level of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory, but with some problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>Minimally acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Passing, but unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Failure, inferior performance</td>
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**Other matters:**

♦ **Classroom etiquette:** Please silence your phones and other electronic devices before the beginning of class. No use of phones during class. Laptops and tablets may be used only for accessing Blackboard readings and for assigned small group activities, unless allowed by a letter from Disability Services. No eating in the classroom. Drinks must be in closed containers.

♦ **Academic Integrity:** Please refer to the Undergraduate Arts and Sciences Policy on Academic Integrity in the University Regulations section of the Student Handbook, particularly the definition of plagiarism. In keeping with this policy, any writing assignment that is determined to be wholly or partially copied from any source, including Internet sources, will receive an automatic grade of zero and will be reported to the Dean of the College and recorded in the student’s file. Cheating on quizzes and examinations will also be handled in the manner described in the aforementioned Policy.

♦ **Students with Disabilities:** Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services at disabilityservices@fordham.edu. The office is located in 45 Columbus Ave, Ste. 106.

**Schedule of Class Topics and Assignments:**

(All readings are to be completed before the class session for which they are assigned.)

**I. Introduction to the Study of the Torah**

**T July 2: Introduction to the course; Traditional vs. Critical Biblical Interpretation**

- Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, Introduction
- St. Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 1, 2, 5, 7 [Bb]
II. Genesis: Stories of Beginnings

W July 3: Primeval Narratives (Genesis 1—11)
Part 1: Ancient Near Eastern Context
- Quiz 1 on Introductory material in *The Torah: A Beginner’s Guide*
- Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, Introduction to Genesis and Genesis 1–4 (pp. ix-xlviii and 9-33)
- Enuma Elish excerpts [Bb]

**Group A:** Compare and contrast the two creation narratives, the Priestly (Gen 1:1–2:3) and the non–Priestly account (Gen 2:4–3:24), in terms of their depictions of the relationship of human beings to God. Is the Babylonian creation myth Enuma Elish comparable to either of the Genesis myths in terms of how it presents the relationship of human beings to the gods?

Part 2: The Documentary Hypothesis
- *Five Books of Moses*, Genesis 5–11 (pp. 34-61)
- *The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide*, chapter 4 (pp. 65-76)
- Atrahasis excerpts [Bb]

**Group B:** What prompts God to destroy the world with a flood? What do God’s decision to let human beings eat other animals (9:1–7) and the story of Noah’s drunkenness (9:18–27) have to do with the reason(s) for the Flood? How do the reason(s) for the Flood in Genesis compare with those in the Babylonian Atrahasis epic?

T July 9: Ancestral Narratives, Part 1: Abraham, Sarah and Hagar
- Quiz 2 on Primeval Narratives (Genesis 1–11)
- *The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide*, chapter 4 (pp. 76-87)
- Jewish and Muslim stories of Abraham [Bb]

**Group C:** What qualities of Abram/Abraham do you think prompted God to choose him as the first ancestor of the “chosen people”? What do you think of the way Abram treats Sarai in Genesis 12 and 20 and Hagar in Genesis 16? Do you think God’s intervention in each case indicates approval of Abram’s actions?

Part 2: Ishmael, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Esau; Etiologies and Type Scenes
- *Five Books of Moses*, Genesis 21–27 (pp. 102-146)
- Abraham’s sacrifice in Islam [Bb]

**Group D:** How do you explain the recurring pattern of God’s favoring the younger son over the elder (first Abel over Cain, and now Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau)? In each case, did the younger son do anything to prove himself deserving of God’s favor? How does this pattern contribute to the characterization of God in Genesis?

W July 10: Ancestral Narratives, Part 3: Jacob and his family
- *Five Books of Moses*, Genesis 28–36 (pp. 147-205)
- John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* [Bb]

**Group E:** How does the rivalry between Rachel and Leah differ from the other examples of sibling rivalry that we have seen so far in Genesis? Does focusing on the experiences of the female characters in these chapters (Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah and Dinah) make you more or less sympathetic with Jacob in his role as patriarch of his family? Is he to blame for his family’s troubles?

Part 4: The Joseph Novella
- Small group discussion
- *Five Books of Moses*, Genesis 37–50 (pp. 206-296)
- The Minimum Bible: Genesis [Bb]
III. Exodus: Deliverance and Covenant

R July 11: Israel in Egypt; Introduction of Moses
- Quiz 3 on Ancestral Narratives (Genesis 12–50)
- Five Books of Moses, Introduction to Exodus and Exodus 1–6 (pp. 299-344)
- The Torah, a Beginner's Guide, Chapter 5 (pp. 88-100)
- “I am Being” interpretations [Bb]

**Group A:** Why is Moses so reluctant to accept the task that God assigns to him? What are some of the difficulties that he will face in leading the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt? What or whom do you think Moses fears the most? Are his fears justified?

Part 2: Deliverance Narrative; Theological Interpretation
- Five Books of Moses, Exodus 7–15 (pp. 345-404)
- Passover traditions [Bb]

**Group B:** What characteristics of God are emphasized in the narrative of the ten plagues and the exodus from Egypt? Why do you think the Israelites would have presented God this way in the context of their deliverance from slavery, an experience which defined them as a people?

T July 16: Journey to Sinai and Sinai Covenant
- Quiz 4 on Deliverance Narrative (Exodus 1–15)
- Five Books of Moses, Exodus 12–13 (reread) and 16–18 (pp. 405-421)
- The Torah, A Beginner’s Guide, Chapter 5 (pp. 100-109)
- Manna Traditions [Bb]

**Group C:** How are the first laws in the Torah, relating to the observance of Passover and the consecration of the firstborn to God, introduced into the course of the narrative? How do the rituals introduced in chapters 12–13 relate to the Deliverance Narrative? What do you think is the purpose of introducing some ritual laws, as well as the concept of Sabbath rest, before the revelation of the majority of the laws at Mt. Sinai?

Part 2: The Sinai Covenant
- Five Books of Moses, Exodus 19–24 (pp. 422-459)

**Group D:** How does the covenant at Sinai differ from the covenants God makes in Genesis? How is the relationship of the Israelites to God and to the rest of the world defined by this covenant? Do the specific laws in the Covenant Code (Exodus 21–23) seem to you to serve the goal of making Israel “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6)?

W July 17: Worship in Ancient Israel
- Quiz 5 on Exodus 16-24
- Five Books of Moses, Exodus 25–40 (pp. 460-535; skim chapters 25–31 and 35–40; read carefully chapters 32–34)
- Images in Christianity and Islam [Bb]
- The Minimum Bible: Exodus

**Group E:** How do chapters 32–34 of Exodus relate to the material concerning the Tabernacle that surrounds them? Why does idolatry seem to be the ultimate sin, from God’s perspective? What does Exodus 25–40 as a whole reveal about the human need to worship?

R July 18: Part 1: Midterm exam

Part 2: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Law
• Small group activity: comparison of laws concerning goring oxen
• Reread carefully the Covenant Code, Exod 20:22–23:33
• Code of Hammurapi and Hittite Laws excerpts [Bb]

IV. Leviticus: Law of (or for) the Priests

T July 23: Sacrificial Worship and Ritual Purity
• Quiz 6 on Exodus 25--40
• Five Books of Moses, Introduction to Leviticus and Leviticus 1–10 (pp. 539-582)
• The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide, chapter 6 (pp. 110-123)
• Theodoret on sacrifices [Bb]

Group A: How does sacrificing animals as a form of worship reinforce the Priestly hierarchy of God over human beings and human beings over other animals seen in Genesis 1:26-28 and 9:1-7? How do you think the ancient Israelites’ relationship to the domesticated animals they sacrificed differed from our own society’s treatment of the animals we eat?

Part 2: Ritual Purity
• Five Books of Moses, Leviticus 11–16 (pp. 583-619)
• Mark and Matthew on Law [Bb]

Group B: In what areas of life is ritual purity an issue? To what extent do the priests seem to exercise control over these areas and to what extent are individual Israelites responsible for maintaining their own ritual purity? What do you think were the costs and benefits of the purity regulations for Israelite society?

W July 24: Holiness
• Five Books of Moses, Leviticus 17–27 (pp. 620-672)
• Selections on Holiness from Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus: A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

Group C: What does it mean for the Israelites to be “holy,” according to the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–27)? How does it relate to the concepts of ritual and moral purity, as explained by Klawans? Does “holiness” have the same meaning in the Holiness Code as in the earlier chapters of Leviticus? Choose specific examples from Leviticus to illustrate your understanding of the concept of holiness.

V. Numbers: Rebellion and Punishment in the Wilderness

R July 25: Numbering the Israelites; The Wilderness Camp
• Quiz 7 on Leviticus
• Five Books of Moses, Introduction to Numbers and Numbers 1–10 (pp. 675-733)
• The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide, Chapter 7 (pp. 124-140)

Group D: What makes the law of the Sotah (suspected adulteress) in Num 5:11-31 a unique and perplexing example of biblical law? What does it reveal about ancient Israelite sexual ethics? On what points do Alter’s and Friedman’s interpretations of the details of the law differ? Which aspects of Friedman’s interpretation do you find persuasive, and which seem questionable?
Part 2: Rebellion Narratives
- *Five Books of Moses*, Numbers 11-20 (pp. 733-787)
- Muhammad and the Prophets; Muhammad on Moses [Bb]

**Group E:** How do you explain God’s decision to let the whole Exodus generation, even Moses, Aaron and Miriam, die in the wilderness and not reach the goal of the Promised Land? Is Pardes’s approach of treating Israel as a character—indeed as the hero of the Torah—helpful in answering this question? From a literary perspective, is the Torah more like an epic or a tragedy?

T July 30: Prophecy and Apostasy
- Small group discussion
- *Five Books of Moses*, Numbers 21–25 (pp. 782-820)
- Balaam the Wicked [Bb]

**Group A:** What do you think is the purpose of the Balaam story, coming as it does near the end of the Rebellion Narratives (but before the worst rebellion)? Are there humorous elements to the story and character of Balaam? What kind of a prophet is he, compared with Moses?

Part 2: Inner–biblical Exegesis
- Quiz 8 on Numbers
- *Five Books of Moses*, Numbers 26–36 (pp. 821-866)
- Origen on Numbers 33 [Bb]

**Group B:** Discuss the interplay of law and narrative in the two passages concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, Num 27:1–11 and chapter 36. If Numbers 36 can be considered an example of “inner–biblical interpretation,” does it merely clarify or does it revise Num 27:1–11? Finally, what is so important about this case that it should be treated so prominently at the very end of Numbers?

VI. Deuteronomy: “Torah” and Theology

W July 31: Introduction to Deuteronomic Theology
- *Five Books of Moses*, Introduction to Deuteronomy and Deuteronomy 1–11 (pp. 869-939)
- The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide, chapter 8 (pp. 141-160)
- Mansur Al-Hallaj: The Ta-Sin of Before Endless-Time and Equivocation [Bb]

**Group C:** Based on the themes that are emphasized most in chapters 4–11, explain what Deuteronomy means by “You are to love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your substance” (Deut 6:5). How does this commandment of total devotion to God relate to the troubling instructions in chapter 7 regarding the seven nations of the land of Canaan?

R Aug. 1: The Deuteronomic Reform and Deuteronomic Law
- *Five Books of Moses*, Deuteronomy 12–26 (pp. 940-1007)
- St. Paul and Deuteronomy [Bb]

**Group D:** It is often claimed that the Deuteronomic Law is more humane and concerned with social justice than the earlier Covenant Code (Exod 20:19–23:33). Evaluate that claim, focusing on chapters 15 and 23–25 of Deuteronomy. Do you see any examples of revision or reinterpretation of particular laws from Exodus in Deuteronomy?

Part 2: Conclusion of Deuteronomy; Review for Final
- *Five Books of Moses*, Deuteronomy 27–34 (pp. 1008-1060)
- Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses excerpts [Bb]
**Group E:** Does your final assessment of Moses agree with that of Deuteronomy 34? If not, what weaknesses do you perceive in his character? In your opinion, what makes Moses a unique character in the Torah?

T Aug. 6: Final exam
Instructions for Essays

Grading criteria: The successful essay...
♦ answers all parts of the question thoroughly
♦ supports all arguments by reference to the biblical text under consideration
♦ shows original thought
♦ is well organized, with introductory and concluding paragraphs
♦ cites the Bible and any secondary sources correctly (see below)
♦ has been proofread for grammatical and spelling errors

Instructions for citation:
1. Include citations whenever you refer to a particular biblical verse(s), whether or not you actually quote it. The standard American form for citing a verse(s) of the Bible is the abbreviated name of the biblical book (no italics or underlining), followed after a space by the chapter number, a colon (no space) and the verse number or numbers. The abbreviations for the books of the Torah are Gen, Exod, Lev, Num and Deut.
   Examples:
   ♦ Gen 1:1 [Genesis chapter one, verse one]
   ♦ Gen 2:4–6 [Genesis chapter two, verses four through six]
   ♦ Gen 2:4–3:24 [Genesis chapter two, verse four through chapter three, verse 24]
   ♦ Exod 6:3,8 [Exodus chapter six, verses three and eight]

   If the citation follows a quotation or reference to a passage, it is put in parentheses:
   ♦ Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt?” (Exod 3:11).
   ♦ The LORD identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod 6:3,8). [Note that the period of the sentence follows the parentheses.]

   If the citation introduces a quotation or reference, it is not put in parentheses:
   ♦ In Exod 3:13–15, God reveals his name to Moses.

   If you refer to an entire book or chapter of the Bible, the title of the book is not abbreviated:
   ♦ In Exodus 6, God again reveals himself to Moses....

2. If you include an idea taken from the notes or introductions of Alter, The Five Books of Moses, from The Torah, a Beginner’s Guide, or from any of the readings on Blackboard, you must cite the author and page number, using a parenthetical citation. You should include a “Works Cited” page with full citations.
   Examples:
   ♦ The term “El” in divine names like El Shaddai and El Elyon, means “God” (Alter 81).
   ♦ The opening verses of Genesis, when translated correctly, do not suggest that God created the world out of nothing (Kaminsky and Lohr 70).
   ♦ Unlike the Babylonians, the Israelites were not concerned about overpopulation (Frymer-Kensky 41).