**The Bible in Light of the Ancient Near East (0109434x)**

Dr. Nili Samet Bar**-**Ilan University

Dear students,

This course is taught through edX, an online platform for Academic courses from around the world. You will study the course as Bar-Ilan students, but your co-learners may come from all over the globe. Please **read carefully** the following instructions.

**Registration**

To enroll in the course, you should:

1. Register through the Bar-Ilan system as with any other course.

2. Register also through edX. Registration through edX will be available from February 1, 2019. Please carefully follow the steps below:

A. sign up to EdX, here:

<https://www.edx.org/>

When you sign up, you MUST supply the same email address that appears in the Bar-Ilan systems.

B. Send an email to Mrs. Rachel Frish from the course team at [nilisamet1@gmail.com](mailto:nilisamet1@gmail.com), and ask for **a coupon**, to waive the payment for the course.

C. Enroll in the course using the following link:

<https://www.edx.org/course/the-bible-in-light-of-the-ancient-near-east-0>

D. Click on Enroll Now > verified track. When the system asks for payment, paste your coupon details. DO NOT SUPPLY YOUR CREDIT CARD DETAILS. Press 'place order'.

E. The system should announce that you payed $0 for the course.

# Course Description

This course is an introduction to reading the Bible in the light of ancient Near Eastern cultures. We will discuss a selection of biblical traditions, genres, and themes from a comparative perspective and explore how the discovery of ancient Near Eastern materials in the modern era has changed the ways in which we read, interpret, and contextualize the Hebrew Bible. While the course will deal with a variety of ancient Near Eastern civilizations, we shall focus in particular on the cultural legacy of Mesopotamia, whose contribution to the comparative study of the Hebrew Bible is most striking.

# Course Objectives

This course will introduce students to the fascinating world of the neighboring civilizations of Israel in biblical times and the comparative study of the Bible and other contemporary cultures.

# Learning Outcomes

1. General acquaintance with the ancient Near East.
2. General knowledge of the way in which ancient Near Eastern cultures contribute to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, specifically with regard to creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and legal, prophetic, and wisdom literature.
3. Basic understanding of the various comparative-research schools and their academic and political context.

# Estimated Effort

2–4 hours per week

# Pre-requisites

This is a general introductory course. No previous knowledge is required.

# Course Schedule

Starting Date: February 26, 2019.

End Date: June 18, 2019.

Unit Schedule and Explanations:

* + The course includes 9 lessons.
  + The first lesson will open on Tuesday, February 26, 2019.
  + Over the following 8 weeks, a new lesson will open every Tuesday.
  + Instructors and discussion moderators will follow discussions in the forums during week days.

After the End date,June 18, 2019:

* You will still have access to the videos and all other course materials.
* You will *not* be able to complete weekly quizzes. In addition, the course team will no longer be available in the forum for discussions and questions. **Do not forget to take all the weekly quizzes before the course ends.**

# Course Program

**Lesson 1:** The Ancient Near East: Historical and Cultural Introduction. **Lesson 2:** Biblical Creation Traditions in their Ancient Near Eastern Context. **Lesson 3:** The Biblical Flood Story in its Ancient Near Eastern Context.

**Lesson 4:** A Theological Perspective on the Creator God: Between the Biblical God and the Ancient Near Eastern Gods.

**Lesson 5:** The Biblical Tower of Babel Story in its Ancient Near Eastern Context. **Lesson 6:** Biblical Legal Literature in its Ancient Near Eastern Context, Part I. **Lesson 7:** Biblical Legal Literature in its Ancient Near Eastern Context, Part II. **Lesson 8:** Biblical Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context.

**Lesson 9:** Biblical Wisdom in its Ancient Near Eastern Context.

# Grading Policy

The following instructions refer to three types of learners:

1. Bar-Ilan students.
2. Non Bar-Ilan students who wish to gain an edX certificate of completion.
3. Non Bar-Ilan students auditing the course.

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| Course Components | Bar-Ilan students | Non Bar-Ilan students who wish to gain an edX certificate | Non Bar-Ilan students auditing the course |
| **Knowledge-Check Questions:** Each unit includes several knowledge-check questions. These uestions appear after some of the video lectures and are designed to help you make sure that you have understood the lectures. | Ungraded | Ungraded | Ungraded |
| **Additional Activities:**  At the end of some units you will find special assignments. These are designed to broaden your horizons regarding the material and enable you to become part of the learning space. At the end of each unit you are also invited to participate in the discussion forum. | Ungraded | Ungraded | Ungraded |
| **Weekly Quizzes:**  Each lesson concludes with a 5- question quiz. Total 45 quiz questions per the entire course. | **45% of the course grade.**  1 point per question.  Total 5 points per lesson.  Total 45 points per | To be eligible for a course certificate of completion, you must get a passing grade in at least 5 quizzes. | Ungraded |

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|  | the entire course. |  |  |
| **Final exam** | **55% of the final grade.**  The exam will take place at Bar-Ilan University. See more details below. | Not required | Not required |
| **Need to upgrade to the verified track?** | NO | YES | NO |

Final Exam **(Information for Bar-Ilan students only)**:

The exam will take place at Bar-Ilan University. Bar-Ilan students will be notified by the university of the time and place in the same way as they are informed of other exams.

Exam Structure and Requirements:

* The exam will include 30 questions. You must answer all 30.

# The exam will focus primarily on historical facts, names, scholarly opinions, and other details mentioned throughout the lessons.

* Details in the bibliography not covered in the course lessons will not be included in the exam.

# Recommended Bibliography

Unit 1

**Secondary source:** A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, London and New York 1995, vol. 1, pp. 1–15.

Unit 2

**Primary Sources:** Gen 1–2; Isa 27:1; 51:9-10; Jer 9:20; Psa 18:14-15; 68:5; 74:12-

14; 82; 89:11; Job 7:12; 26:12; 40:25.

The Babylonian Creation Myth, *Enūma Eliš* (B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses*, Bethesda 1993, vol. 1, 351–402); Enki and Ninmah ([http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr112.htm);](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr112.htm)%3B) M.S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 2 Vols., Leiden 1994

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*idem*, “Well Tempered Words: Ceramic Metaphors in Mesopotamian Literature”, in:

S.C. Melville et al. (eds.), *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*, Leiden 2012, 141-153.

R.S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura. *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, Vol. 4, Eisenbrauns 1994.

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W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, Winona Lake 2013.

Unit 3

**Primary Sources:** Gen 6:5-9:17; Atrahasīs (B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses*, Bethesda 1993, vol. 1, 158-201); Gilgamesh tablet XI (B.R. Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, New York and London 2001) ; M. Civil, “The Sumerian flood story” in: W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford 1969, 140-145.

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A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 Vols., Oxford 2003.

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E. Finkel, *The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood*, London 2014.

G. Darshan, “The Calendrical Framework of the Priestly Flood Story in Light of a New Akkadian Text from Ugarit (RS 94.2953)”, *JAOS* (forthcoming; currently available at Academia.edu).

Unit 4

# Secondary Sources:

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B.N. Porter, *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, Vol. 1, Casco Bay Assiriological Inst. 2000, esp. 273–319.

Y. Muffs, *The Personhood of God*: *Biblical Theology, Human Faith, and the Divine Image*, Woodstock, VT 2005.

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M.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, Oxford 2011.

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Unit 5

**Primary Sources:** Gen 11:1-9. Nebuchadnezzar’s inscription in: F.H. Wessbach, *Das Hauptheiligtum des Marduk in Babylon*, Leipzig 1938, 46–47. Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, in: H.L.J. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, Atlanta 2003, 49-96.

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2. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: a Commentary* (trans. J.J. Scullion), London 1984, 540–542.

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W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, Winona Lake 2013, 196–200.

R. Gnuse, *Misunderstood Stories: Theological Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, Eugene 2014.

Units 6–7

**Primary Sources:** Ex 21:1-23:19. Hammurabi Laws 1-7; 112-136; 196-282; 241-

252. Eshnuna Laws 53-55; Middle Assyrian Laws 3-8 (M.T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Atlanta 1995). Hittite Laws 1-21; 70-79.

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**Primary Sources:** Deut 18:9-22; Jer 28. Mesopotamian Omens: (S.M. Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height: the Akkadian Omen Series” Šumma Alu ina Mēlê Šakin”*, 1998; U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian Liver Omens*, Copenhagen 2000), Ancient Near Eastern Prophecies: M. Nissinen et al., *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, Atlanta 2003; S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9), Helsinki 1997;

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M. Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources*, SAAS 7, Helsinki 1998.

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Unit 9

**Primary Sources:** Prov 22:17-23:12; Job 1-5, 29-31; Qoh 1-2; 11-12. Egyptian Instructions (M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian literature: a book of readings*, Berkeley 1973, vol. 1, 58-80); Ludlul Bēl Nemēqi and the Babylonian Theodicy (T. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, Tübingen 2014); Dialogue of Pessimism (B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses*, Bethesda 1993, vol. 2, 815-818);

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